

future news

A newsletter from the *futures* foundation

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What happens next in the war on Terra?

Humanity has been waging a war on Terra since the birth of the industrial age. At first it was done in ignorance of the consequences, but now we know better. Our planet and its life forms have been severely wounded by human over-population, pollution and wars. And there's worse to come with the global warming that results from our post-industrial lifestyles.

So what happens next?

We could just carry on, choose to make no significant changes and doom our children and theirs to brief and brutal lives of bare survival.

Or we could learn to become a wise society and modify our behaviour in a way that delivers attractive individual and community lifestyles at the same time as it protects Terra and all of its life forms.

One logical first step towards that goal is also a logical next step for the evolution of our species: the simple task of reaching global agreement on a better system of planetary governance. (See page 2.)

The big question is: if we're so smart, why haven't we done that already? Well, okay, perhaps it's not so simple. But for those who see no acceptable alternative, isn't it time to get on with it?

A new monograph by veteran futures professor Richard Slaughter may help, by describing pathways to social foresight.

It also addresses that big question, exploring deep-seated reasons why futuring, the process of actively engaging with the future, has had to fight so hard for recognition and acceptance.

Reviewing the efforts of futurists and futuring organizations to make an impact on policy in Australia, he notes that despite sustained commitment, "most of these efforts seemed to remain at a relatively low level of operation and, with some exceptions, were constantly rebuffed or marginalized by nearly all the major social formations. Whatever was said or done, 'the future' remained out of sight and largely out of mind in the wider society and culture.

"Given the propensity of our species for world-shaping actions, the emergence of a wide range of associated opportunities and threats... and, sadly, the continuation of so many endemic conflicts around the world, this oversight seemed - and still seems - paradoxical....

"The future cannot be left to 'take care of itself'. There is simply too much that can, and will, go wrong."

He concludes that the 21st century is clearly a

'make or break' time for humanity and that present trends, continuing global dysfunctions, do not encourage optimism.

"The diet of 'bad news' that characterized the late 20th century will continue for a long time to come because humanity is still only part way through a

challenging and painful transition that will take generations to complete. Endemic conflicts will continue. The environmental news will worsen. Coral reefs will shrink and even disappear, forests become remnants. We will lose many more species. Whole areas will become deserts. Overall, the erosion of the ecological foundations of life will continue unabated.

"Equally, the fear of annihilation - whether by a resurgence of nuclear conflict or by some unstoppable mutating lethal virus - will loom large over rich and poor alike, particularly in over-crowded cities. It is a terrifying prospect - so terrifying, in fact, that those with the relevant money, resources, choices will, en masse, generally opt for the comfort of images, unreality industries, 3DTV, instead of the exacting work of facing up to it. But face these issues we must if we are to see our way through the impasse and beyond."

But Professor Slaughter does offer some signs of hope. First, he reminds us that futures studies, or 'social foresight' can be developed to help humanity



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First steps towards a Terran civilization

A new movement is gathering around the world aimed at developing clear ideas of what a planetary civilisation might look like and how it could work. As the World Wisdom Alliance meets in Toronto this month to discuss *Creating the New Civilization*, the Futures Foundation joins other global organisations in supporting this visionary initiative.

Ironically, the growing interest in this logical next step for humanity emerges at a time when mainstream media are reporting a trend to "resource nationalism", with indications that the nation-state could see a resurgence in strength (see *story p4*). But according to Club of Budapest president Ervin Laszlo, this is no more useful than arguing over deckchairs on the *Titanic*.

"We are now approaching the limits of sustainability in our globalized system," he says. "The status quo is no longer tenable. One or another of the available alternative paths of development must be entered upon. The alternatives are numerous and wide-ranging. They include on the one extreme a progression involving growing stress, conflict, and chaos, and on the other a development that leads toward sustainability and peace."

Professor Laszlo has for years been writing and speaking on the nature of change and the need for humanity to address looming challenges and opportunities. The new initiative, led by the Club of Budapest and its partners, will bring together groups and networks ready to take action to meet this need.



"We have arrived at a watershed in history," he says. "The unsustainability of the world means that change must happen, and that it cannot be piecemeal and superficial. The future can no longer be a simple continuation of the past; it will have to be fundamentally different. Many people have difficulty comprehending this basic fact. They still believe that 'the more things change, the more they are the same'. After all, they say, we are dealing with humans and human nature, and these will be pretty much the same tomorrow as they are today."

Ervin Laszlo does not agree. Instead, in a long article for *Kosmos Journal* (www.kosmosjournal.org), the famous physicist describes some popular understandings of what the future might be like, then demonstrates why such conventional thinking is unlikely to be helpful, by describing the known processes of complex change revealed by the study of chaos theory.

"Bifurcations in society are all-encompassing: they involve every segment and every aspect, politics and business, as well as culture, lifestyles, and the environment," he says. "They are shifts that are 'macro'. Macroshifts drive toward the progressive integration of

different peoples, enterprises, economies, societies, and cultures in systems of more and more people and larger and larger dimensions. They are more embracing than economic and political processes by themselves.

Economic globalization and political integration are elements in macroshifts, but they are not the whole process.

"In the past macroshifts were local, national, or regional. Today's macroshift is global. Humanity's sociocultural evolution has reached the dimensions of the planet."

After the war on Terra

(from page 1)

steer towards more viable futures. Then he points out that when we learn to stop looking to established institutions for direction, solutions will emerge from a very different direction.

"If the collectivity is effectively disqualified from responding to the deepest needs of a nation and a world faced by more diverse dimensions of hazard and uncertainty than it yet knows, then the initiative will come from smaller, more empowered groups and, finally, from individuals.

"It is here that the greatest potential for further work and progress currently lies. In other words, the ability of society to understand and respond to its nascent futures can, in the end, only emerge from one source: the growing number of individuals who have refused the current diversionary and sugar-coated versions of progress put forward in the mass media, embraced new forms of professional practice and embarked on their own journey toward higher awareness and enhanced functional capacity."

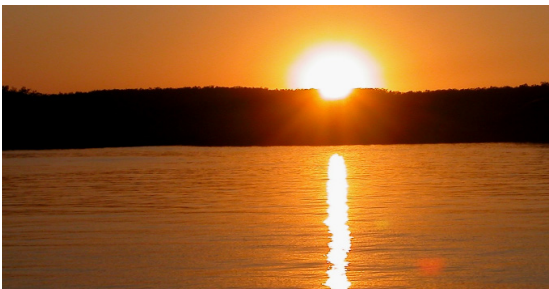
Perhaps history will call them the first Terrans.

One of the great successes of futuring in Australia has been establishment of the Strategic Foresight Program at Swinburne University, founded by Richard Slaughter as the Australian Foresight Institute. With more than 100 graduates in the past few years, it is creating a new generation of professional futurists to address these key issues of social foresight.

If our grandchildren and theirs live in peace and plenty, as part of a wise global civilization, chances are it will be the result of the pioneering work done by today's futurists and their successors. And if that society is really wise, social foresight will be as fundamental a part of community life as health and education are today.

Indeed, the critical measure of mature societies in the future may be the extent to which they are able to engage wisely with their own long-term futures.

The monograph, which was supported by the Pratt Foundation, is available from the Strategic Foresight Program at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne (www.swin.edu.au).



VALUES, LIFESTYLES AND THE NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

A report from a young community counsellor in 2020

The world in 2020 is in many respects similar to the world I knew as a young girl in the early years of this century. There are nearly 200 countries, some of them industrialized, others predominantly rural. Some of them make full use of the latest technologies, others prefer being guided by their traditions.

There are two dozen giant cities, but they are not growing any bigger. Most people live in sustainable communities in medium-sized cities and towns and in rural environments.

People are just as diverse as at the turn of the century, and since life is less stressful and more relaxed, cultural diversity can flourish without arbitrary constraints by hunger, joblessness, and heavy-handed bosses and governments. North Americans and Latin Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Indians and Asians, the same as Europeans, Africans, Australians and Polynesians, can express their values and safeguard their traditions.

Abject poverty has been all but eliminated: everyone's right to food, housing, education, and socially useful remunerated work is recognized and respected. We do not all live at the same material standard; some of us are more affluent than others. Yet the affluent among us do not use their wealth for ostentation and wasteful luxury.

Even the comparatively rich adopt simple lifestyles, far simpler than those of rich people in the 20th century. They do so voluntarily - not just because legislation and taxes offer economic incentives, but because of a sense of responsibility for themselves, their neighbors, and their environment.

We do not believe that living well calls for amassing material goods. It means living comfortably, in some cases even luxuriously, but luxury does not lie in the quantity of the goods we own or control, but in achieving a high quality of lived experience.

The dominant aspiration is personal rather than economic growth. It is the growth of intellectual and emotional life, achieved not in the isolation of a private dwelling, whether mansion or hut, but in the embrace of family, community and country, and the global community of all peoples and countries.

As we join together to improve the quality of the living and working environment, our community life enjoys a renaissance. There is a renaissance of spirituality as well. More and more women and men rediscover a higher and deeper dimension of their

"The dominant aspiration is personal rather than economic growth"

life. Since physical existence is now more assured, there is less pressure on people, and this leaves more time for family, community and nature, as well as for inner development.

People live longer and healthier lives, but the population of the world is not growing any further. Longer lifespans are offset by smaller families as people realize that it is irresponsible to produce children beyond the replacement level. This has obvious benefits. With a modest family size we are able to take better care of our children, ensuring that they grow into healthy individuals, with sufficient education to live peacefully and sustainably, in harmony with human society and with nature. (Report via Ervin Laszlo.)

NEW LOOK AT THE "WORLD GAME"

While hundreds of thousands of people celebrated on the Champs-Élysées following France's qualification for the 2006 World Cup final, not everyone was joining the fun, according to US writers Dave Zirin and John Cox.

"Proud racist and leader of the ultra-right wing National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen...decried France's multi-ethnic team as unrepresentative of French society, saying that France 'cannot recognize itself in the national side'...Le Pen and others of his ilk do not recognize themselves in a team whose leader is of Algerian descent, Zinedine Zidane, and whose most feared striker is black, Thierry Henry...."

"Le Pen's efforts to use the pitch as a battleground for his Neanderthal views about immigration and Islam have not gone unanswered. After his latest comments, France midfielder Lilian Thuram said, 'Clearly, he is unaware that there are Frenchmen who are black, Frenchmen who are white, Frenchmen who are brown. I think that reflects particularly badly on a man who has aspirations to be president of France.'"

Thuram went on to say, "When we take to the field, we do so as Frenchmen. All of us. When people were celebrating our win, they were celebrating us as Frenchmen, not black men or white men. It doesn't

matter if we're black or not, because we're French. I've just got one thing to say to Jean Marie Le Pen. The French team are all very, very proud to be French. If he's got a problem with us, that's down to him but we are proud to represent this country. So Vive la France, but the true France. Not the France that he wants."

The day after France's semifinal victory over Portugal, Zidane released a statement in conjunction with an antiracist initiative. Zidane's message reads, "There is no place for racism. It is impossible to love this sport, to play it, or to support a team and be racist or xenophobic at the same time. The values conveyed by football are the exact opposite of racism. Because racism promotes exclusion and hate. Football, in contrast, brings people together to share a common pleasure. Every four years we experience a unique time in which people congregate together, take part together and celebrate together. Racists are not invited."

In addition, the immensely talented Henry has started an antiracist campaign called *Stand Up Speak Up*. Henry pushed his sponsor Nike to produce black and white intertwined armbands that demonstrate a commitment against racism. So far, they have sold more than five million. (www.commondreams.org)

Who will own the resources? Does it really matter?

Who will own the resources in a planetary society? The governments of nation states? Corporations? Or communities? Or will the idea of "ownership" itself give way to new ways of managing access to the resources we share on our fragile planet?

It does seem ironic that just as futurists begin to engage in serious conversations about an emergent planetary culture, signals from the margins suggest the geo-political world may be moving in the opposite direction.

Just what are our resources anyway?

James Arvanatakis of the University of Technology Sydney would like to see a return to the traditional sharing of resources held in common.

"It is time to draw a distinction between those goods that can be managed by the market and those that belong to the community," he says. He sees wise resource management as the most appropriate response to the shortages our children and theirs will face - not just shortages of food, water and other resources, but also shortages of other kinds of social 'goods' like trust, safety and happiness.

The young graduate student and lecturer established The Commons Institute (www.commonsinstitute.org) in a bid to lift this topic into wider awareness. And he argues that we need to understand the global commons in different ways. While the commons can include 'public goods' such as public space, public education, health and infrastructure, he says, there are also commons in the social sphere, such as our sense of hope, trust, and the intellect itself.

"This group of commons can be shared and managed just like the physical commons - that is, they can be used to promote a sense of abundance."

Signal #1: Resource nationalism

Business intelligence agency Williams Inference reports a wave of resource nationalism as oil prices climb and competition for energy sources sharpens. And oil may be just a start: "Tomorrow, or the day after, it will be mining."

The scramble for ownership of resources has already begun, it says. Bolivia has nationalised its natural gas industry; Venezuela is raising taxes and royalties on foreign companies. Ecuador is nationalising oil; Russia is limiting foreign ownership of energy ventures and talking about taking control of projects from Shell, and others. China is "prowling the globe in search of energy resources", especially Africa, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan (not to mention Australia).

But while energy, especially oil, is centre stage in the global theatre, growing shortages of food and water are waiting in the wings. The world is now eating more food than farmers grow, pushing grain stocks to their lowest level in 30 years. "Rising population, water shortages, climate change, and the growing costs of fossil fuel-based fertilisers point to a calamitous shortfall in the world's grain supplies in the near future," says Canada's National Farm Union.

Won't technology fix it? Don't count on it, says Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute.

"There isn't much land left on the planet that can be converted into new food-producing areas....Unlike the Green Revolution in the 1960s, when improved strains of wheat, rice, maize and other cereals dramatically boosted global food production, there are no technological magic bullets waiting in the wings."

In the case of water, the double impact of shortages and privatisation has led to riots in communities whose water rights have been sold, with disastrous consequences for the locals.

It all adds up to an alarming set of challenges. Will these shortages and the rise of resource nationalism encourage the renaissance of the nation-state, after all? That would confound 20 years of speculation that the nation-state will give way to more local and global systems, largely because of the difficulty of managing the movement of things like information, money, work and pollution across national borders. And if the nation-state strengthens, how might this affect the long-standing practice of national governments divesting their responsibilities to private enterprise?

The rise of collaborative "clusters"

Another positive new line of thinking that's gaining strength is "glocalisation", a trend to bypassing the nation-state with direct connection of local business nodes to a global economic grid. Glocalisation allows both greater integration with the world economy and the shifting of power from central government to local communities.

This new direction has encouraged "clustering", the collaboration of related businesses in geographic regions for the purpose of competing in the global market.

"Economic geography during an era of global competition involves a paradox," explains Professor Michael Porter of Harvard University.

"Changes in technology and competition have diminished many of the traditional roles of location. Yet clusters, or geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, are a striking feature of virtually every national, regional, state, and even metropolitan economy, especially in more advanced nations.

"Clusters represent a new way of thinking about national, state, and local economies, and they necessitate new roles for companies, government, and other institutions in enhancing competitiveness."

Signal #2: Is privatising out of date?

Faint signals in recent years suggest the global love affair with privatisation could be cooling anyway.

For example, in March 2001 Jonathan Freedland reported in *The Guardian* of London on key changes in California and New Zealand (*Future News 03 01*).

"Look at California now," he said. "The state that was once synonymous with freewheeling capitalism is turning dramatically. Driven by an electricity crisis that has caused rolling power cuts....California is set to 'renationalise the grid.'"

In New Zealand, which Freedland noted had Thatcherised before Thatcher, Reaganised before

GOOD NEWS:

This little crocodile went to market

An inspiring group of rural women met at a forum in Canberra in May to compare notes on their leadership roles in Australia's regional areas. Our report of the event follows on page 6, but meanwhile, here's a closer look at one story that captured the essence of this tireless, innovative, action learning group.

Queensland crocodile farmer, Lillian Lever and her husband established the state's first commercial crocodile farm in 1981. Their initial focus was on skins, and they soon built a market for first-class Australian crocodile skins with the Paris tanneries of quality brand manufacturers like Hermes. Growing success with the skins left them with a large number of carcasses, so they turned their attention to finding new markets for crocodile meat in Asia.

Next, Lillian went to France and Italy to attend international leather trade fairs and investigate markets for second- and third-grade skins from their own and other Queensland crocodile farms, and to discuss with Italian manufacturers the prospects of a joint venture. Now those skins are exported to Italy for tanning, and re-imported to Australia for manufacture into a range of creative products here.

Meanwhile, back at the farm... Lillian developed a pilot project with some government assistance, and found a way to improve their crocodile husbandry and make sure that almost all skins were first-grade. As a result, the farm has presold its entire output of skins to the end of 2007.

Some of us might think that would be enough, but this Queenslandian's capacity for innovation didn't stop there.

Discovering that crocodile serum is interchangeable with human serum, she explored new markets in this area too. At the same time she investigated other therapeutic products from crocodile farming, many of which are highly valued in Asia - along with the crocodile penises that the farm dries for export.

But wait, there's more! The crocodile farm is now open to thousands of tourists, and has received national and state awards for tourism as well as business.

And when future generations question the ethics of farming any animal - even the dangerous crocodile - no doubt Lillian's successors will have found new ways to make this and other sustainable "harvesting" the basis of the business.

BAD NEWS:



We are grateful to Alan Moir for permission to reproduce this powerful image at our website.

Who will own the resources?

(from p 4)

Reagan - "a new government has turned things around...they have dared to buck the global trend towards privatisation - and even reverse it."

Growing concern about privatisation of water supplies has also led to reversals. John Vidal reported in *The Guardian* that after pressure from banks and governments to privatise for efficiency, dozens of cities now regret privatising their water too hastily.

"In the past few years the attitudes of governments and companies have changed. The World Bank, the European Union and governments such as Britain's may have pressed to get developing countries to privatise their water systems for the benefit of their own companies, but civil society is now an active force and companies are not nearly as confident of making profits."

A fascinating twist in the pattern emerges with reports that the government of Singapore has been buying into big business - including millions of dollars worth of infrastructure -- in Australia. As well as interests in telecommunications and health, it has added Australia's third-largest energy retailer to its portfolio for \$5.1bn, making it Australia's biggest energy provider (*AFR 28 04 04*).

So are we facing a choice between a planetary society and resurgence of the nation-state? And a reversal of the trend to privatisation? Or can we imagine a whole new way to manage the affairs of humanity? If we were to choose a better way, what could it be?

Maybe there are lessons to be learned from the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, described as an under-reported "good news story" by Keith Suter in his book, *Global Notebook*. He says the

treaty was unusual for its time in that it created a form of international machinery. "Many countries are willing to accept international obligations (via treaties) yet want to reserve to themselves the responsibility of ensuring that they keep their obligations.... The Antarctic Treaty, however, by its consultative arrangements and mutual obligations, has created a limited international system of enforcement." Dr Suter described the treaty as "a showpiece of international law in operation".

"The treaty is self-enforcing: it's in each country's interest not to violate it because the gains from respecting the treaty's provisions far outweigh the gains that might result from breaking them."

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the International Geophysical Year (the global scientific collaboration that gave birth to the 1959 treaty) perhaps we can expect more attention to be given to this treaty as a model for new forms of international governance.

Bushie learning, bushie action

is Australia's future still emerging from the wide, brown land?

Australians used to pride themselves on their "can do" attitude, an ability to make the most of circumstances - with a bit of fencing wire or 4x2, perhaps. It's one reason Australian executives have done so well in the global marketplace. In a world of constant change, the value of past experience diminishes. This creates a need for just-in-time learning combined with the ability to design solutions with available resources, and then take fast action. But are we losing this capacity, in our city slicker 21C Australia? Has our massive coastal urbanisation made us wholly dependent on the supermarket, the sewer and the small screen?

"Not where we live," says an extraordinary group of rural women who have won national awards for their ingenuity in a host of areas. Whether they're knocking on the front doors of Savile Row tailors with alpaca samples or exporting the private parts of crocodiles to Asia, these women are demonstrating Aussie get-up-and-go every day.

"Not where I live," says futurist and educator Dr Paul Wildman, who wants to formalise Australian "bush mechanic" ingenuity in a code of action learning that reverses the separation of learning and practice that has overtaken western education systems.

"In Australia there is a term for someone who links thinking and doing," he explains, "someone who can act forward wisely and solve problems with what is available while developing innovations that respond to broader needs.

"A bush mechanic is committed to self reliance and excellence at her task and is not to be confused with a 'backyard mechanic' who does shoddy work."

The rural women award winners would agree. As each one told her story at a National Reunion Forum

hosted by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation in Canberra, action learning - the ability to learn from practical experience, to rethink, redesign and try again -- became a constant theme. For most of them it was not just a pathway to their own success, but a skill that they wanted to share.

"It has never been more important that people work together in developing a vision for the future of rural families, industries and communities," said Terry Underwood, from the Northern Territory. When she's not helping to manage the 3,000 square kilometer cattle station she shares with her husband and children, she's working with community organisations, writing books and taking pictures. It can't be a dull life: her autobiography (*In the Middle of Nowhere*) is now in its 16th reprint.

Lee Berryman echoes the sentiment: "The future of agriculture hangs on rural enterprises sharing their knowledge and information, acting cooperatively and being prepared to take on new practices and challenges," she said. "Players in the industry must work together, allowing each sector to develop viable businesses ventures with sustainable returns." Lee grows mangoes, bamboo and dragon fruit, as well as managing a nursery that markets grafted mango trees and exotic fruit trees.

In Victoria, Elaine Paton is sharing her learning in a manual of leadership and management skills for rural women that aims to increase women's access to effective training. "Women who 'step out' will pass on their skills to their own businesses and to the community," she says.

Not all of the skills being shared by these and other amazing rural women are focused on work and work management. Elaine points out, for example, that

much of her learning was about things like farming family relationships and succession planning.

Paul Wildman would endorse all of these comments, and add some more. For example, he sees the "bush mechanic" approach to learning as not only having immediate practical outcomes for practitioners and their environment; it also develops a body of expertise that will stand us in good stead in an innovative Australia, as well as any future emergency.

"A functional structural mismatch in education -- action-less conception and concept-less action -- has emerged strongly over the past two generations. This dilemma has been identified and explored by many educational commentators, especially in vocational education, where every day we hear of dire skill shortages."

"The 'bush mechanic' approach proposes re-branding ideas and action in projects aimed at improving the future. This is a post-industrial form of what in medieval times was called 'artificing' - the step beyond artisan, and a Middle Age precursor to today's technician. By placing learning within the context of practical work we can put thinking and doing back together again in a practical approach to innovation while including the theory behind the task and the design of the final project. Idea, design and implementation are all part of the learning."

It was Carol Mathew of Central Victoria who gate-crashed the Savile Row tailors, demonstrating quite clearly the quality of Australian alpaca wool - and the quality of Australian initiative. Other women are sending lobsters by mail; breeding seahorses for aquariums; exporting duck eggs to China (3000 a week from one supplier); promoting the medicinal properties of xanthones (powerful anti-oxidants found in the mangosteen fruit); flying Australian wildflowers to Europe, Japan, China and the USA; finding new ways to process sugar cane for food and fibre; harvesting native foods, medicines and nutraceuticals; creating natural beauty products; and much more. And as they do all this, they are changing the way country women live and work and learn, and encouraging the next generation to create their own innovations for a better future.



Award winner Lisa Jarvis of Victoria: see her story and others at www.futuresfoundation.org.au.

CONFESSIONS OF AN ECONOMIC HITMAN

Economic hit men are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex and murder."

Somebody told me years ago not to miss this book, but it took a delay at Canberra airport to make it happen. Now I can't believe I waited so long. Its content is critical knowledge for every voting-age citizen in any democracy - and should be part of high school and university curricula.

John Perkins was a frustrated graduate who joined the National Security Agency in the US to avoid being sent to the Vietnam War. From there he joined the Peace Corps, and was soon recruited by a major corporation, at that time called Chas T. Main Inc., and trained as an "economic hit man". His job, which involved working for the US government alongside his official day job, was to give misleading economic information to the governments of developing countries, to persuade them to commit to unaffordable loans for massive infrastructure projects to be delivered by US corporations, and to ensure that the consequent economic catastrophes would render them vulnerable to US demands.

There's no need for another full review. A quick google offers a host of them, plus the description of publishers Berret Koehler, who released the book in 2004 (www.economichitman.com). It has since been released in paperback by Random House around the world.

That same googling will also connect you with the fascinating "want to know" site, which offers "reliable, verifiable information on major cover-ups and a call to work together for the good of all" (www.wanttoknow.info/johnperkinseconomichitman).

What makes John Perkins' story so powerful? It may be its terrible logic. Or that it clearly confirms the misgivings so many of us have had about American foreign policy in recent times. The book throws the spotlight on the cynical intentions of much of the west's - well, America's - global "good works". It's riveting stuff for anyone with an interest in the theory and realities of global governance.

And there's no risk of worshipping the story's "hero". Perkins admits that he began to understand exactly what he was doing quite early in his career, but for all the usual reasons he continued to take the money and deliver the goods. That's a bit depressing, but maybe we need to remind ourselves that practical ethics may be a costly luxury for many of us as we make our journey through life. On the other hand, the power of what Perkins does reveal at last cannot be ignored. While we may not choose this man to lead us on our journey to enlightenment (that's the business he's in now), the content of his biographical book will be causing some "agonising reappraisals" in countries around the world.

— Jan Lee Martin

Gore's film turns up the heat

Al Gore's new film opened in the United States in May carrying the message that he's been spreading for two decades: that the world is facing catastrophic climate change because of the negligence of mankind, wrote Rick Klein in the *Boston Globe*.

"But *'An Inconvenient Truth'* is debuting with a sort of exquisite timing that Gore has rarely been accused of possessing in his long career in public life, according to members of Congress of both parties. A convergence of factors -- including soaring gasoline prices, devastating hurricanes, and growing Evangelical concern about environmental degradation -- is slowly moving global warming to the forefront of political debate."

Although conservative politicians are still trying to position Gore as an environmental extremist, popular sentiment is swinging round to the man who has conducted a tireless, 20-year-long roadshow on environmental issues.

"Gore's style in the film, combined with the growing interest in the subject matter, could force political action, said Representative Edward J. Markey, a Malden Democrat," wrote Klein.

"Al Gore becomes everyone's favorite science teacher of all time in this movie; he's the latter-day Mr Wizard," Markey said. "It's something that has now flipped for people. The public is paying attention."

Kennedy story a time bomb?

The blogosphere has been abuzz, but a long article by Robert Kennedy Jr that accuses Republicans of cheating in the last presidential election was widely ignored by America's establishment media, wrote Kenneth F. Bunting in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (09 06 06).

"In terms of bad news judgment, this could turn out to be the 2006 equivalent of the infamous 'Downing Street memo', the *London Times* story that was initially greeted by the US media with a collective yawn....

"Robert Kennedy Jr's mega-essay in *Rolling Stone* accused Republicans of widespread and intentional cheating that affected the outcome of the last presidential election. It focuses on voting irregularities, questionable tallies and disenfranchising practices, particularly in Ohio, which President Bush won by more than 100,000 votes.

Kennedy's 11,000-word article was *Rolling Stone's* cover story, published days earlier. "But if you were looking in the five or six days afterward for follow-up stories, investigations or even a mention in [*the Post-Intelligencer*], its cross-town competitor or just about any other major US newspaper, you were almost certainly disappointed....for the most part, national and regional newspapers, the major networks and news services have behaved as if the article was never published, that it broke no new ground and there was nothing of interest or significance in it....

"Kennedy's article is not just old news reshaped. Its 11,000 words, not counting the 208 footnotes, most of which contain Web addresses for links to source information, are certainly overreaching at times. For those with mistrust or partisan fervor against Bush, Kennedy's reporting will sound like evidence of fraud and election tampering that rivals the shenanigans of the worst Third World dictators."

Signals in the noise....

Creeping desertification to force mass migrations

Over one third of the earth's land surface is threatened by desertification, which may force 60 million people to migrate from sub-Saharan Africa to northern Africa and Europe by 2020. "Desertification directly affects the lives of more than 250m people and threatens another 1.2bn in 110 countries." said a UNESCO press release. "The economic impact is also considerable. Lost agricultural production due to drought and desertification costs an estimated US\$42 bn annually, with another US\$2.4 bn spent fighting land degradation. Experts believe the problem is likely to worsen.

www.unesco.org

26 June 2006

Stay home and save the planet

Our love affair with flying is fuelling phenomenal growth in the airlines' activities: flight numbers are projected to double by 2020 and triple by 2030. But it is also driving phenomenal growth in the airlines' greenhouse gas emissions, writes British Green MP Caroline Lucas. "According to scientists at the Tyndall Centre, one of the UK's foremost climate change institutes, aviation's emissions are growing so fast that they will gobble up all reductions from every other sector if they are left unchecked, she wrote.

The Independent

22 June 2006

Nearly 2.2m American residents behind bars

Prisons and jails added more than 1,000 inmates each week for a year, putting one in every 136 US residents behind bars, according to the Justice Department. It also found 62% of people in jails have not been convicted, meaning many of them are awaiting trial.

Overall, 738 people were locked up for every 100,000 residents, compared with 725 in 2004. In the 25-29 age group, an estimated 11.9% of black men were in prison or jails, compared with 3.9% of Hispanic males and 1.7 percent of white males.

Associated Press

May 22 2006

Demand for Organic Food Outstrips Supply

America's appetite for organic food is so strong that supply can't keep up. Organic products still have only about 2.5% of the nation's food market, but that slice is expanding at a feverish pace, writes Libby Quaid. Growth in sales of organic food has been 15% to 21% each year, compared with 2% to 4% for total food sales. The number of organic farms - an estimated 10,000 - is also increasing, but not fast enough. Organic manufacturers are now looking for ingredients outside the United States.

www.commondreams.org

7 July 2006

Rescuing a planet under stress

The global economy is outgrowing the capacity of the earth to support it, pushing early twenty-first century civilization ever closer to decline and possible collapse. Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, explains how to put it back on a stable footing. **(Full story at www.wfs.org)**

The Futurist

July-August 2006

Profits driving Howard's nuclear task force

Government subsidies are not among the issues to be examined by a Federal Government taskforce on nuclear energy, although nearly half of the 100+ items are economic -- relating to the money to be made from uranium exports, uranium enrichment and the management of nuclear waste. Economic issues heavily outweighed environmental and health concerns, writes Wendy Frew.

Sydney Morning Herald

6 July 2006

Evolution as action learning

By reconstructing ancient genes from long-extinct animals, scientists have demonstrated the step-by-step progression of how evolution created a new piece of molecular machinery by reusing and modifying existing parts. The findings, published in the journal *Science*, offer a counterargument to doubters of evolution who question how a progression of small changes could produce the intricate mechanisms found in living cells

New York Times

July 4 2006

...& Peter Lazar "revues" the news

Push for Allies in War on Terra

Washington July 2006.... "The War on Terra could fail unless new allies can be encouraged to pitch in," a usually reliable source, Dr Condiment Lisa, said today. "While there is some cause for celebration in escalations in a number of theatres of the war, with desertification and the climate clearly hotting up, more needs to be done by those countries who have not yet reached the full potential of their support for the global war on Terra." However the news was not all bad, she said. "Good news from India and China shows that these nations are increasing their populations, are fully committed to using more fossil fuels as well as nuclear energy, and are moving strongly towards materialism in an endeavour to catch up with their allies in the war.

"And more good news this week, reporting that Australia is working towards a nuclear future in spite of its ample sustainable energy sources, is a tribute to our allies Down Under, who have worked so hard to demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the economic interests of our own key constituencies," she said. "Although the population of the wide brown land, and its leader, are only small, it is encouraging to see that Australia is fighting above its weight."

More at www.futuresfoundation.org.au