

HOPE AND ENTERPRISE



BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC ECONOMY
FROM UNDER GROUND UP

TED SILVERMAN



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

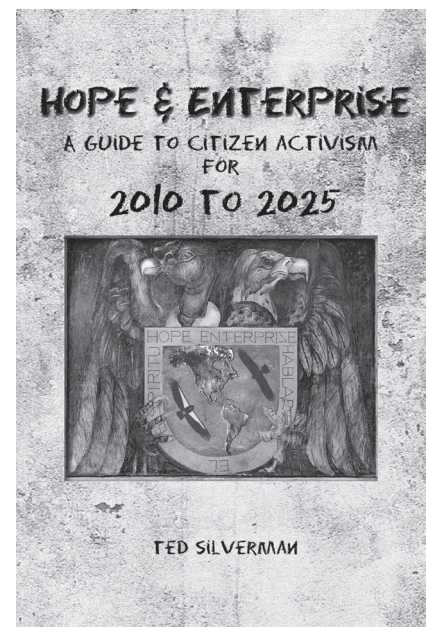
For the past two-and-a-half years, preview copies of an earlier version of this book – a black and white, pocket-sized edition with no internal graphics – have circulated among a small but not uninfluential group of people. Much has happened in this period and for many reasons, some noted below, the format of the present work is sufficiently different from that of the original that I was forced to publish it under a new designation, as a second edition. The “first edition” appeared before the advent of the Arab Spring and Occupy Movement and its subtitle, *A Guide to Citizen Activism for 2010 to 2025* has been somewhat mooted by these and other developments.

I intended publication to be accompanied by a substantial online resource, the first iteration created by me in the hope that it would be augmented, in Open Source fashion, by sympathetic readers with appropriate experience. But the effort to develop an elaborate and compelling 3D virtual world, which I believed would help draw developers to the project, absorbed considerably more of my time than I had anticipated. I ended up with an interface that, at least in its present incarnation, works only on machines with fairly fast processors and more than average memory. This [as yet one man] effort would continue to delay publication even now if I hadn't decided to move forward without first porting the interface to run smoothly on every computer/browser combination – Firefox currently seems best, at least on Windows. Accordingly, the rudimentary functionality for collaboration has been separated from the thus somewhat superfluous front-end and is accessible from any platform.

In view of the limited accessibility of the proto-interface I've included some screen captures indicating its functionality in the book, as well as some graphics connected with other aspects of the project. Hopefully this imagery will enhance the narrative and help communicate my vision for things generally, which remains open to all suggestions. I've also included previews of two other books (to be published if you, the previewers, believe the effort worthwhile) intended as organizing material. One targets a moderate to liberal readership while the other is aimed at people engaged in or otherwise sympathetic to the Tea Party (just as the “Open Letter” is an appeal to communities of faith). I can hear the readers' guffaws but I'm not alone in thinking this a worthy endeavor. Professor Chomsky, for example, has frequently noted that sympathy with Tea Party concerns can be found throughout a good portion of the “middle class” and is rooted in valid complaints – factors that make for an accessible and educable audience.

At any rate those interested in pursuing the ideas presented here can find relevant information in the section entitled “WHERE TO GO FROM HERE” on page 47. I look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Ted Silverman

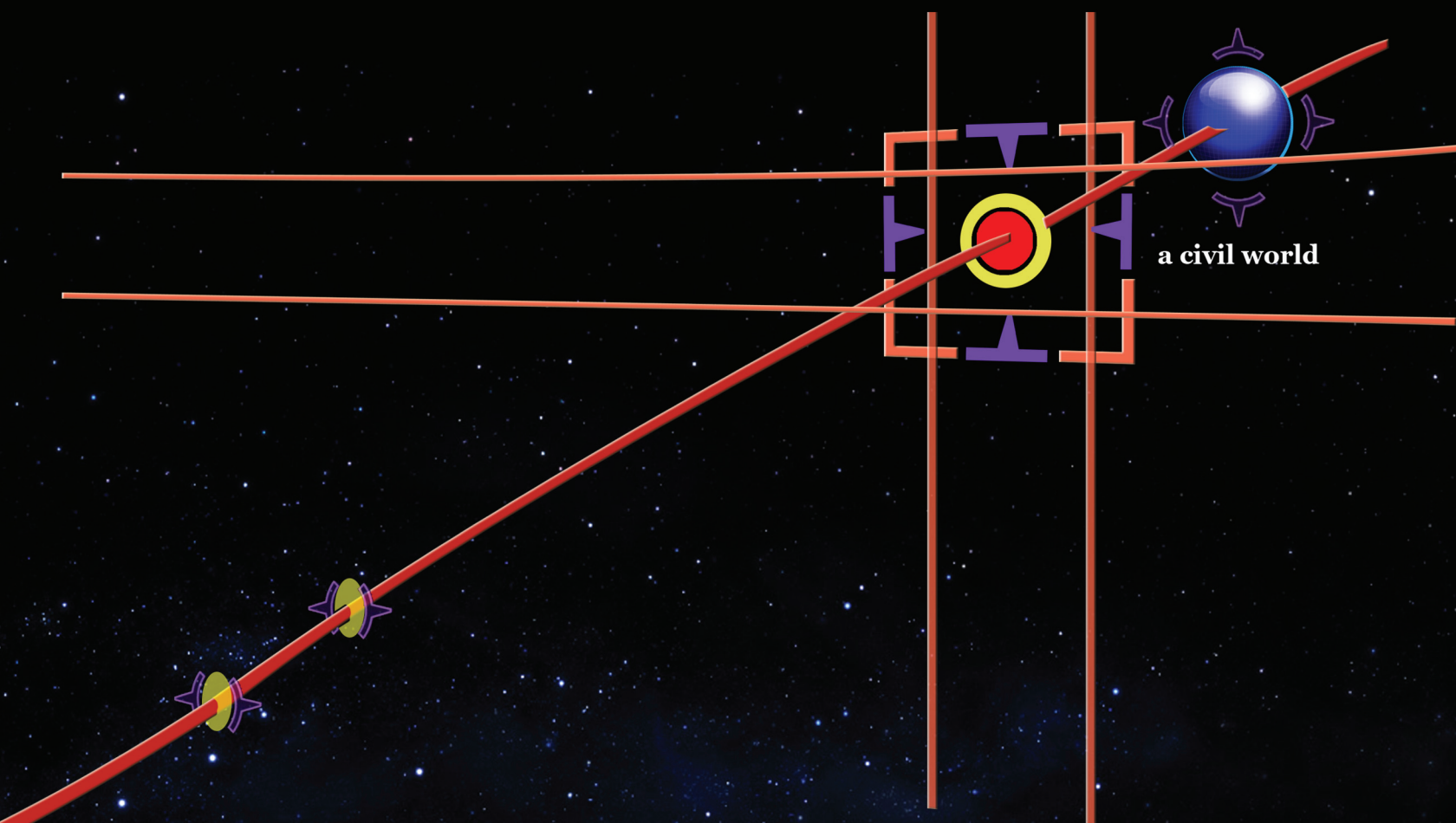


Original Book Cover

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HOPE AND ENTERPRISE

As these words are written humanity stands poised astride the millenary threshold, before prospects that echo rather eerily the end-time tribulations of its ancient, apocalyptic fables. One hears rumors of wars, and earthquakes and impending planetary disaster, while a glorious renaissance and blessings of universal prosperity seem dimly visible on the horizon. “Interesting times,” to say the least.

From a practical perspective, concern for these prospects resolves to the question of whether an advanced technological capability is, in the final analysis, destructive of or conducive to a global civil society; the answer to which turns on another, *namely*:

Can a truly democratic order emerge from our patchwork civilization before a catastrophic setback occurs?

While this dependence might escape the understanding of many powerful and influential people it is well understood by many more; and certainly by those for whom this manifesto is intended. The latter comprise a small yet enormously important subset of humankind often referred to as *Activists*: those committed individuals who have done their homework and so have some sense not only of the true meaning of the word *democracy* but also, most crucially, of its dearth in practice in the real world; especially the deep divide that exists between, on the one hand, the intentions and aspirations of the people of the planet’s self-proclaimed model democratic republic – a nation that spends more on war than the rest of the world combined – and the actions and policies of its government on the other.

While the course of human events can’t be predicted with much confidence recognizable trends nevertheless emerge.

It wasn’t long ago that the rich and powerful trembled in fear and rampaged in paranoid reaction before the ineluctable iron fist of history, which the poor and oppressed had claimed for their side. At the other end of the ideological divide, it seemed just as inevitable that the ever-growing effectiveness of the technological means of production, regardless of who held the reigns, would guarantee an upwardly mobile standard of living for the world at large. Yet today’s disparities between rich and poor are more pervasive and devastating than ever before. And while our “civilization” has indeed developed the capacity to provide for the basic needs of all, it does not do so – as witnessed by millions of thirsty, starving and diseased children; countless thousands of them perishing daily from readily preventable causes.

It is therefore just as implausible that a democratic revolution can be indefinitely postponed by the promises of technological progress as that one must inevitably occur, precipitated by a sharp division of humanity into two starkly opposed factions. Rather, as with so many aspects of social life, technology establishes another terrain of struggle – it can be used to keep people oppressed as well as it can be employed to emancipate them from mindless toil. And while gross disparities of power and privilege are at the root of all evil, such disparities take diverse and intricate forms.

For these and other reasons too numerous to mention I

take it as self-evident that independence from concentrated power, regardless of its guise, is the cure for that which ails us. Moreover, there is presently an unusual opportunity to obtain it: not merely by virtue of circumstance and the mood of the people, who now only need an opportunity for action put before them, but also because of the millions of committed movement activists who are well organized and more than capable of engaging them.

Accordingly, these words are not so much a clarion call to the public as a whisper to the choir, crafted less for popular enlightenment than for the promotion of a particular project and plan – the project being the development of a new socio-economic order, the plan based on two broad premises, *viz.*:

1. Democracy, as defined hereunder, is more than merely desirable; it is crucial to decent survival of the human race. It implies not only equal participation and/or influence in the political decision-making processes that affect one's life but also such participation/influence in personally relevant economic activities.

2. Many people in technologically advanced countries, especially the United States, are bamboozled into believing that premise (1) is fallacious – that “extreme” democracy is undesirable and/or implausible – just as they are deceived into believing much in general that is false or misleading, particularly about the policies, actions and motives of their respective national governments. The fostering of this misconception is crucial to concentrated power, as it tends to inoculate otherwise libertarian-leaning spirits against the understanding that, in a social context, *democracy and freedom are the same thing*: which is why promoting imagery of “rugged” – read *isolated* – individualism is a favorite propaganda tool of the powerful; alienation of the majority from collective action being their fondest hope.

In accordance with these premises, it would seem that a key obstacle to constructive development is the deficiency, among large numbers of people in powerful countries, of salient information regarding how contemporary societies operate and inter-operate. It is therefore reasonable that a large part of activism is aimed at raising consciousness. And it is equally comprehensible that the public relations operations of powerful groups, public and private, utilize vast resources for the contrary purpose of keeping people as confused as possible, especially with respect to issues touching on power.

(Such propaganda confuses the kinds of liberties that might be germane to life in a wilderness with those relevant to life in an advanced human society. Freedom, properly understood, is the same thing as power, *viz.*: *The capacity to fulfill desire*. People combine into societies because their respective powers are thereby mutually enhanced. The measure of a person's freedom is identical to the measure of their power – when one has more power than another, one likewise has more freedom. Understanding of this simple,

self-evident identity is the principal thing that this sort of propaganda seeks to obfuscate, because people become indignant when they understand that they are not equally free and that those with greater power have conspired against them in order to maintain unequal status. This would seem to be the principal point of dissension between self-labeled ‘Libertarians’ and those who tend to be classified as ‘Progressives,’ ‘Radicals’ or ‘Anarchists.’ That is, freedom and equality are quite narrowly defined concepts under conventional U.S. doctrine and *Liberty* is the moniker for freedom in the narrow, conservatively acceptable sense.)

Unfortunately, there is an inherent asymmetry in the relation of the educational efforts of activists to those of institutional actors, because the former are often unpaid voluntary players whereas the latter are largely paid to play. Owing to the present social status of money – by which I mean the pervasiveness and depth of commitment to it, and its asymmetrical distribution – the benefits of organization often favor the wealthy. That is, while money is not the only way to organize people it is currently one of [if not] the most effective. Faith in the extant monetary system, despite turmoil and corruption, remains relatively strong in the “first world.” This asymmetry is crucial because the immediate needs of survival tend to trump education and activism. (This is one reason why some of the oldest, most established social organizations are those that furnish food, clothing and shelter, *e.g.*, certain churches and groups related to them. It is also why, of course, when faith in an extant order is faltering an enlightened despot may institute limited welfare measures – to partially buy off dissent and take the radical edge off activism.)

But this disadvantage is not as debilitating as one might think, particularly under current circumstances. There is a salient sense in which deleterious economic conditions can factor positively in the functioning of a progressive movement, an approach to money matters that can swing the economic pendulum in favor of the disenfranchised. While money is indeed an effective means of organizing that is *all* that it is – *i.e.*, a socio-psychological construct that furnishes a mechanism for directing people's behavior. Insofar as money is not consumable or otherwise practically usable it is only as a symbol that it is useful, as *social convention*, like international datelines and daylight savings time. Thus, faith in money is equivalent to – in the final analysis identical with – faith in the myths sustained by society at large (as fostered by its public relations operations, such as the myth that people cannot universally own and operate the businesses to which they rent themselves as slaves, surrendering ownership of their work product for a pittance in order to enrich their “superiors”). If great numbers of people did not buy-in to such myths the power of symbols to enslave them would be broken.

And yet the entire social fabric is, in this sense, made of whole cloth, and it is hardly reasonable to simply propose the dissolution of the threads that bind it. Rather, the power

of the money myth must be employed differently; redirected, effectually and ethically, by leveraging economic self-interest in order to educate – and by leveraging education, in turn, to elevate the nature of economic relations.

What follows is a fairly detailed set of suggestions for how this might be accomplished under present circumstances, without unusual governmental cooperation or changes in existing law.¹ In the interest of clarity and concision, those parts of the presentation that I have thought might benefit from extended discussion – or, despite my previous disclaimer, should perhaps be brought before a wider audience – are elaborated in separate sections at the end of the book.

The task ahead is clear. Many enlightened spirits have prepared the way, both morally and practically; some by shining a light on the darkest recesses and abuses of power, others by providing means to free ourselves from those abuses. Among the latter we find civically committed scientists who, as you will read in what follows, have provided the technological capability for people of modest means to begin running their homes and vehicles on sunlight and water² – inexpensively and immediately – and thus to begin growing a clean, grass-roots-based energy infrastructure that will help enable an end-run around state and corporate power.

There are many such critical innovations that we now must marshal if we are serious about change. One of the purposes of this little book is to put them before the right audience – to help ensure that the most dedicated people understand the present possibilities, many of which are truly exciting. While it is uncertain whether this world was ever a host to paradise it is surely within our power to make one of it if enough of us commit to do so. Remember Tolstoy: Quoting his source, *The kingdom of heaven is within you*.

How to Get There from Here 1

Where is *Here* and Where is *There*?

Here is a closed, hierarchical society organized by money. It is closed inasmuch as it depends upon the deliberate and careful restriction of access to human sourced and controlled resources, from material goods to information, under the moniker of *property rights* – a social construction that creates artificial value by way of artificial scarcity. It is hierarchical inasmuch as control of these rights is in the hands of an elite minority, which manages and distributes them via a complex system of *patronage* as reflected in the structure of the *Corporation* – the predominate extant business form.

There is an open, democratic society organized by its citizens at large. It is open insofar as rights and access to productive resources are controlled in bottom-up rather than

1 This doesn't mean that there shouldn't be efforts directed at changing policy, just that such change is not deemed a prerequisite for the development of the movement and projects described herein.

2 Water that can be sourced from biowastes and brine and come out at the end of the process as one-hundred percent pure H₂O.

top-down fashion, while value is associated with actual usefulness. Price is neither artificially inflated by deliberate restriction of access nor set too low by the discounting of “externalities” – from environmental and other collective values and opportunity costs to the desires and needs of individuals who contribute the human input to production. Work – again, *human input* – is undertaken freely; individually or under a partnership model, so that the *cooperative* displaces the corporation as the predominant format for economic enterprise: All are entrepreneurs and equal partners in the enterprises in which they participate.

The current leading representative and agency of *Here* is the government of the United States, which uses its overwhelming military superiority to maintain and promulgate the order under the façade of Liberal Democracy. On the domestic front, those who cannot be usefully incorporated without physical duress can yet find their place within the vast universe of prisons, which funnel public funds to the private operators who build and manage them and are licensed to extract forced labor from their charges. Because in the U.S. both the political system and the mass media are dominated by money, its superficially impressive democratic institutions are dysfunctional, so that popular demands can only be effectively pressed, albeit weakly, by direct action. Voting, of itself, is largely ineffectual because money-operated filters function throughout primary selection processes to block truly populist politicians from reaching the ballot in general elections, and obscure not only the positions of the candidates on issues of popular concern but also, in large measure, the issues themselves. Thus if a populist occasionally makes it to the ballot most people don't understand the salient differences between the candidates' positions – “image,” shaped by money, tends to determine outcomes. Between elections, the interests of the politicians' wider constituencies are overwhelmed by those of well-funded lobbyists, who finance the next round of campaigning and too often author the laws, which, also too often, are not even read by the nominal legislature.

The leading representatives of what *There* can be like are – with respect to control of productive resources and producer-consumer relations – those enterprises that operate on the *Cooperative* business model; and, with respect to operations and work input, *Open Source* development projects. There are no restrictions on sharing of media resources or information other than such as concern attribution of creative credit³ and perhaps public safety. More specifically, *There*, in its nascent stages, comprises a market system of cooperatives, owned jointly by those who operate them and those

3 Contrary to popular propaganda copyright and patent restrictions, so-called intellectual property laws generally, are not in the best interests of creative individuals – writers, artists, software developers, inventors, etc. Rather, it has been documented that such laws have an overall deleterious effect on those who do original work, tending to restrict creative freedom and remuneration while concomitantly enabling concentrated capital to exploit such work for its own pecuniary interest, the true purpose served by the concept of intellectual property. See K. Fogel on copyright, page 70.

who consume their products and services.⁴ Over time, as an extensive federation of such enterprises evolves, development will be accelerated and market inefficiencies reduced.

With economic power more or less equally distributed – which implies no concentrated control of media – extant political institutions can begin to function more healthfully, though there remains ample scope for enlarging public participation in political processes (a topic also addressed in our plan vis-à-vis the development of an extensive infrastructure for participation in policy formation on the local, national and international levels under the auspices of the *Project for United Nations Citizenship* – see “Project for United Nations Citizenship” on page 39, *P.U.N.C.*).

Here employs a fiat monetary system insulated from democratic control and ineluctably inflationary, inasmuch as money flows into the system via the extension of credit, commanding interest.⁵ This is a tax on the money in every pocket – interest, compounding daily, on every dollar in circulation. But the beneficiaries of that tax are not the people at large, via the public treasury, but rather the private owners of the banks and brokerages for whom the government merely provides security and manufacturing services (with respect to the printing of paper money and the coining of metal tokens, while subsidizing with public funds the private suppliers of paper and metals). Moreover, because credit must be repaid with interest, often much more than the amount of the principal, and because new money is not created to cover that interest but only to cover the principal, the system is effectively a pyramid scheme in which enormous numbers of debtors must fail and hence lose their assets to creditors (more on this in “An Open Letter to all Churches, Temples and Mosques” starting on page 78). The cycle of boom and bust is an intrinsic feature of the system, leading to ever-greater concentration of wealth in fewer hands. Full employment is not merely difficult to achieve but is decisively rejected *Here* as undesirable. It is institutionally impossible to accomplish – underemployment is deemed the most desirable way to manage labor costs and inflation and to provide human fodder for the military.

There has an anti-inflationary, energy-based money system. Not only is the currency “backed” but monetary tokens are actual units of physical energy and the productive capacity thereof: Optical and/or thermal and/or mechanical energy-cell/battery/capacitance devices capable of transforming and storing various forms of ambient energy. In a high-tech world, coinage can comprise smart, renewable energy cells with real-world usefulness and value, mooted the issue of inflation and mitigating ancillary currency concerns generally, such as counterfeiting.

There has full employment inasmuch as everyone, minimally, has some degree of participation in civil planning

and management at a local, community level if not beyond in the federation of community and business councils that span the nation and the world (one’s degree of participation dependent upon inclination, capability, availability, etc). As an adjunct to local and national civil involvement every individual, as a citizen of the world, enjoys equal participation in United Nations policy and decision making (again, see “Project for United Nations Citizenship” on page 39).

Here has centralized, wasteful and dirty energy production. Transportation relies on non-renewable, polluting energy sources. Communications and media channels are centrally controlled by a handful of corporations. Media and information are centrally controlled by draconian intellectual property laws, increasingly enforced by hard-wired encryption mechanisms that are physically embedded in consumer devices and integral to their functioning. Pharmaceuticals, including – also increasingly – naturally occurring substances and even living organisms, are patented and priced out of reach of many with dire nutritional and medical needs. And infamously, in the belly of the *Here*, medical care is rationed on the basis of wealth.

There has distributed, efficient and clean energy production from renewable ambient sources. Transportation not only relies on such distributed, renewable and clean energy production but contributes to the cleansing of the environment.⁶ Cooperatively owned and operated communications and media channels ensure wide-open, private and free communications and distribution of media products and information. Moreover, ongoing development of distributed communications technologies contributes to the freedom and privacy of both monetary and information transactions. Manufacturing is *Open Source*, largely distributed, innovative and ever-expanding without restriction other than such as may be based on concerns of public safety. This includes pharmaceuticals and the chemical and biotech industries generally. Access to crucial, health-preserving pharmaceuticals and medical resources may not be restricted by anyone and are available to society at large, regardless of who produces them. Medicines and medical care are universally subsidized and free to all.

All in all, *Here* runs a zero-sum game. The currency and the chosen source of energy – fossil hydrocarbons – are intentionally and preferably finite, respectively, in order to ensure that wealth flows from the bottom up as the people lose their assets to a tiny minority of ever-wealthier winners. In contrast, *There* has endless opportunity for all – its energy sources are abundant and clean and there are no limits on the prosperity that can be created by and for everyone.

4 By involving consumers in the planning of productive processes democracy is enhanced and the need for marketing and external finance reduced.

5 This is discussed more fully in the Open Letter, page 78.

6 For example, burning hydrogen in an internal combustion engine removes pollutants from the air and yields pure water. Bio-ethanol burns almost as cleanly and, more importantly, the net effect of its production and use is to lower atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. .

How to Get There from Here 2

Morality, Motivation and Education

Social revolutions have the following two inherent pitfalls, which can only be avoided if there is strict commitment to non-violence and the avoidance of destructive action generally:

1. Concentrated power, regardless of form, is the primary social evil and organized violence its worst manifestation. In this sense, it is intrinsically evil to use violence to displace an extant regime, precisely in proportion to the power needed to overcome it. To qualify such an evil as “necessary” is dubious, regardless of intentions or even outcomes – at best it may be *expedient*. A revolution that depends on concentrated power carries the very disease it seeks to destroy, merely in a different guise...as history teaches all too well. Moreover, violence calls upon destructive personality traits and enhances the worst aspects of human nature.

2. Destruction is inefficient. Building or rebuilding a social infrastructure from scratch involves much more work than renovating an extant one and is thus wasteful of valuable resources. On the other hand, once a productive infrastructure has been established resources for progress and ongoing transformation become ever more readily available; hence the exponential character of technological development.

From a strategic as well as moral perspective one might say that *the means justify the ends*. The opportunities and resources at one's disposal constrain the range of action under a given set of circumstances and so the outcome. In other words, the transition from *Here* to *There* must be doable. It is one thing to speculate about an entirely new sort of economic system and another to implement such a large-scale, radical departure from existing norms. Moreover, unless the existing system is an abominable dungeon with no redeeming characteristics such an abrupt change is hardly desirable. Complex systems are unpredictable and it is unethical to experiment recklessly with something so crucial to human well-being and survival. It is much more sensible, and moral, to make controlled changes to an extant system, as long as those changes are meaningful.

And there are strong reasons to believe that meaningful change is within reach. As noted, there are good working models close to hand, embedded and functioning within the existing system. (Admittedly only tiny fluctuations in a vast corporate sea – like scattered bubbles in overheated water appearing here and dissolving there – which yet, with the application of a bit more heat, can suddenly transform into a roiling boil. Thus the stock-market-financed corporate system can be counted on to catalyze its own vaporization. Self-interested investors will sell the shares of any company ‘Short’

for short term profit if they believe those shares will fall in value – the likely market reaction to a properly structured and focused competitive attack from a pervasive Cooperative market base, together with well-timed/placed critiques and public relations campaigns, originating in wide-ranging segments of society and aimed at the investing public; from “social investors” to those with purely pecuniary motives, who will happily ride a trend sparked by conscience.) As described more fully in what follows it is possible, on the basis of these models, to trace out a plausible transformation of *Here* to *There* – and not insignificantly, to do so within the laws and overall framework of the current order.

This last is an important consideration for a project as vast as the one here under discussion. There are plenty enough obstacles to be overcome without head-on confrontation with state power. Such conflicts may occasionally be unavoidable, perhaps in the context of some particular direct action for a tactical purpose, but it isn't generally conducive to constructive action. In a place like America, where there are relatively strong guarantees of civil liberty under a well-established legal system, reasonably respectful of law and often even justice, our work is best advanced over the moral *and* legal high ground.

Of course, no one should be so naïve as to believe that simply following the law will protect progressive activism from attack, even in the US. But our plan portends an intrinsic invulnerability; a cover that comes with scale and diversity. The sheer size of the movement and its diffuse distribution across the economic, geographic and sociopolitical landscapes make it virtually invincible. Ours is not a monolithic enterprise that can be directly challenged; it is a syndicalist synthesis of economic, political, neighborhood, community and other social organizations working independently towards a common goal, which can yet marshal collective resources in order to come to the aid of an individual or group.⁷

This last point devolves to the topic of motivation. While education is essential to social transformation and knowledge must guide action, the motive power of a social movement, as with any human endeavor, is perforce emotional. And what is needed now is inspiration as potent as naked self-interest – as the very instinct to survive.

Experienced organizers often note that, whereas activism among ‘ordinary’ people in third-world societies seems clear and decisive concerned ‘first-worlders,’ though well-intentioned and intelligent, often lament that they don't know what to do; that they can see no solutions to the problems of the world. The reason for this distinction is not difficult to grasp: There is a considerable difference between the first-person experience of daily suffering horrible depredations and remotely witnessing the suffering of others, especially if insu-
⁷ “What can be done against such a revolution as that? Nothing; it must be accepted... There lies the whole secret. An invasion of armies can be resisted, but there is no resistance to an invasion of ideas. It is the glory of barbarism to be conquered by humanity, it is the glory of savagery to yield to civilization, it is the glory of darkness to give place to light.” Victor Hugo, *History of a Crime*.

lated from such suffering. Which is simply to say that anyone who derives a benefit from existing circumstances, whatever that benefit may be, has something to lose and is therefore compromised with respect to the inclination for change. People are naturally “conservative” with respect to existing advantages unless far greater ones are likely to be obtained.

Of course, to those for whom the satisfaction of helping others is powerful motivation, *i.e.*, those who are extremely empathetic and intolerant of injustice, the drive to engage in struggle can outweigh the appeal of the status quo, hence the possibility and existence of activism among the privileged. But self-interest often runs in a different direction. It is therefore imperative that the advantages of action be made real to the broad masses of people expected to participate – clear and distinct; attainable and of overriding personal concern. In order to overcome the destructive influence of short-term self-interest some alternate tribute, as tangible as the dollar currently is in the eyes of most, must be in the offing. Thus, to those groaning under the burden of unemployment work must be offered; meaningful and remunerative work. And what more meaningful work can be found than that of building a better world?⁸

This is the power and beauty of the vision before us. We can answer the practical needs of the people and with their help, in turn, advance beyond the narrow limits within which greed and concentrated power have kept them enslaved for so long. The key that will unlock the shackles is sustainable economic prosperity premised on real value – *Energy* – creative utilization of which is the root of all wealth.

8 This sort of practical yet enlightened motivation is much healthier than the sort of fanatical, ideological commitment that has often characterized mass movements (as described by Eric Hoffer in *The True Believer*).