

"Faced with today's food and energy crisis, how can society improve its well-being?"

Summary:

At this moment in time where the economy is in turmoil and global warming is impossible to ignore, there is opportunity for change. A crisis can bring people together and give birth to new ways of living and inventive solutions. People need to be encouraged and rewarded for making conscious choices. While slowing down and working less we could all benefit from the riches of a simpler life. Improvements could include rationing and community activities which would bring people together and generate produce locally for everyone's benefit. Key to improve society's well-being is a collective willing for change.

Essay:

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For most people, their world today is very different from what it was a year ago. Even though everyone has not been personally affected by the crisis in the economy, they will know someone who has lost their job, been unable to sell their house or has had to cancel their skiing holiday. Several countries have officially entered recession and this is devastating news for hundreds of thousands of people. In these dark times for the economy there are always spots of light and in a twisted turn this is great news for the environment.

Every day we hear reports of consumption slowing down along with lower amounts of waste and fewer holidays abroad. In a society that has got used to 24 hour shopping and multiple yearly vacations, the necessary changes in peoples spending may

be painful for many. It has been internationally agreed that something needs to be done about CO2 emissions and whether it is done through government policy or individual or collective efforts doesn't really matter.

Frugal living might be one of the key words for the future and this brings a whole lot of golden opportunities for society to improve its well-being. Somewhere along the line the true cost and value of things has been lost. Mass production of cheap products with a short life-expectancy has replaced hand made labours of love, built to last with the price tag to follow. The cost of for example oil fluctuates day to day and with time the prices WILL go up in relation to the reserves falling.

In Bertrand Russell's essay In Praise of Idleness he argues for the positive aspects of leisure. If everyone worked shorter days, more people could be employed and everyone would have time for recreation and education. The industry is built on numbers and targets rather than the best interest of the people. Therefore if there is a downturn in business a part of the workers are made redundant whereas the rest are overworked.

"In this way, it is insured that the unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness. Can anything more insane be imagined?"

This essay was written in 1932 but is more relevant than ever. Russell argues that the more sensible solution would be for everyone to work four hours a day instead of eight. Thus keeping everyone in employment and giving valuable leisure time to all.

As those hit by recession come to terms with living with less money there are also positive consequences. More people are staying in and with the food prices going up more people are going back to the kitchen, inviting friends and family, learning how to cook good, healthy food from scratch and dabble in the art of baking. Sales of processed ready meals have shown to be going down.

Perhaps more people will leave the car and go to work by public transport or bike. This would dramatically improve the air quality in our cities and also give physical exercise. It has been claimed that the British population was in a collective state of health during World War II, this was a combination of physical labour and excess eating being banished by food rations.

As a matter of fact rationing is an idea that is current again. Many scientists and environmental activists, among them Mark Lynas, has proposed CO<sub>2</sub> rationing as a way to curb climate change.

This could be a very democratic way of slowly cutting down on emissions. Each nation would have an allotted amount of emission rights. These amounts would then be distributed equally among the citizens. This could be administered with simple swipe cards, working the same way as the cards we use for topping up our phones for example. A certain amount of "credit" would be added to these cards and they could then be used for all activities which require the use of fossil fuels.

The total amount of credit would decrease from year to year as a smooth way to cut down on emissions giving people time to adjust to a low

carbon life style. This would also kick start the currently underdeveloped technology for renewal energy, making it really worthwhile to invest in. This way people can still go about their lives, for example if a person wants to fly from Europe to Australia, this is still possible but it might take up a big chunk of the credit meaning that the person have to drive his car a bit less.

These credits could be traded meaning that people who want to use more could easily buy credit of anyone willing to sell. People living a low carbon life style would then be able to sell their credit and make a bit of money. This way you would be aware of the true cost of pollution and people not using all their credit would get rewarded for it.

With people being more careful with money and perhaps discover a new found interest in food, people will cherish the act of cooking and become more interested in the origin of their food. This will be good news for local organic farmers but there are also interesting projects for community gardening. In all bigger cities there are spots of communal wasteland. There have been successful projects performed where people in the community use these bits of land for growing their own produce.

Food doesn't come more local than that and it only cost in time, not in money. A lot of these cost saving exercises including car-pooling help bring people together and strengthening the spirit of the community. If we all decide that we want change and that the change can be good there are endless opportunities to make the future better and we will all feel so much better for it.

