

The 21st Century Revolution A Call to Greatness

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The 21st Century Revolution - A Call to Greatness

Introduction

It's OK for you. We and our children will have to face your generation's irresponsibility way beyond 2050. A sixth former

As a parent, grandparent and fellow world citizen that is my starting point.

We face the greatest challenges in human history. This book is for people all over the world who want to create a happier, fairer, more peaceful world and prevent environmental catastrophe. It is for people who want to be well-informed. The book will help readers make sense of the situation, find solutions and decide how they want to participate in bringing about the radical changes that are needed. There is a widespread collapse of confidence in current politics and economics. The challenges are enormous, but so are the opportunities. Change is in the wind all over the world. Change springs out of vision and hope. The book will provide both. When great shifts come, they tend to come fast; the old order collapses quickly. Remember the fall of the Berlin wall.

There is widespread anti-establishment sentiment. The economic policies of the past thirty five years are being challenged, especially by younger people; so is the way we have done politics for the past seventy years. Yet radical new policies, large scale events and campaigns involving thousands often go unreported in the mainstream media. There is so much positive news the conventional media doesn't give us. That will be remedied in this book.

It is now 23 years since the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997. Yet decisive action has not been agreed or taken. The 21st annual session of the International Climate Change Conference is to be held in Paris, 30 November to 11 December 2015. There must be a breakthrough. Sir David King, UK's Special Representative for Climate Change, whilst hopeful of this session, says climate change is the "*biggest threat facing mankind at this moment*" and reaching agreement "*more critical to the future of our civilization than 1945*" when the UN was created following two world wars.

This year also marks the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. There are growing calls for radical reform of outdated democratic institutions and a different way of doing politics. Reform has been obstructed for decades and in some cases for over a century. The determination of the suffragette women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries provides a lesson for us. They won the vote. We need to win a lot more.

As George Monbiot says

Society moves from the margins, not the centre.

I compare our situation today with the dark days before World War Two. Then Britain faced a Nazi invasion, a complete takeover of Europe and world domination. Today the challenge

is even greater: the catastrophic effects of climate change and destruction of the ecological system. In 1940 George Orwell wrote:

*The initiative will have to come from below.I only know that the right men will be there when the people say they really want them, for it is movements that make leaders and not leaders movements. And A real shove from below will accomplish it. **Why I write – The English Revolution.***

And so it was and the war was won.

Today, we are again confronted with leadership failure. Leadership will be a major theme throughout this book. The challenges are great. Yet ecologically and economically illiterate political leaders are failing to tackle them. The obsession with unsustainable growth measured by GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on a finite planet we are warming up is madness. It will lead to growing violence, resource wars and migration. Instead of GDP, we need wellbeing as our measure of progress.

A great big scam robs us and threatens our survival. In 2008 the Western world suffered the worst financial crisis since the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Its primary causes were irresponsible banking and too much lending and borrowing. The recession that followed soon led to austerity policies implemented to varying degrees throughout Europe.

Neoliberal ideology (explained in Chapter 5) has dominated economic policy for thirty five years. It has profoundly affected our values and how we treat our fellow human beings. Blatant greed at the top is shocking. Corporate responsibility has become an oxymoron. In this environment, it's hard for companies and their leaders to be responsible and survive.

In the UK, the financial crisis gave the Tory led Coalition a golden opportunity to decimate the public sector. Austerity, based on ideology, not on sound economics, was forced through by an illiterate government without a mandate to do so. Deep cuts will continue under the new administration. These hindered and continue to hinder recovery and deficit reduction. Every day there has been news of the dire consequences of counterproductive cuts. Whilst the rich got richer, and doubled their wealth, average real incomes fell by 8% compared with 2007. For those in work they still have not recovered. Ordinary people who create wealth are robbed in ways I shall explain.

Similar policies have been implemented in Europe with similar results, adversely affecting young people, particularly in Greece and Spain. Fundamentally they are the same policies imposed on poor and developing countries by Western institutions for decades.

Greece, with its highly dysfunctional economy in urgent need of reform, is the current most disastrous example: a combination of irresponsible lending followed by insistence on debt repayment and austerity led to deep depression and 25% unemployment. Youth unemployment is 60% (50% in Spain). Finally, in the Greek referendum 61% of voters

decisively rejected a further international bailout from the Troika (IMF, EU and European Central Bank) with continuing austerity attached.

Austerity is like draining a patient's blood to purge the evil humours once thought to cause disease. Of course, all the bloodletting did was to make the patient weaker and more likely to succumb. Luckily most of us are made of stronger stuff. But millions of people are needlessly suffering; it's a shameful waste of human potential.

These policies will continue unless active citizens demand change.

In the UK we've allowed ourselves to be conned (helped by campaign advisers, some with dubious connections) and ruled by an out of touch political class, in the pockets of the Big Banks, Big Business and the super- rich, who because of dwindling party membership, that used to be millions, fund their campaigns.

*Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. George Orwell in **Why I write – The English Revolution.***

We need a very different agenda. A system based on short-term self-interest rather than generosity of spirit has no future in the 21st century world. The same applies to foreign policy. The recent election campaigning in UK was based on fear. Instead, we need a vision that uplifts and engages people in a great new endeavour that creates a prosperous society in which everyone benefits.

As Yvonne Roberts says,

A good state would give each of us the chance to thrive. A dynamic modern country should not treat its citizens as passive clients, but as agents for a greater change..... An opportunity for a genuinely participatory, challenging, creative and active citizenship requires something different from the state than the retail politics of selling 'the offer' to the electorate.

Neal Lawson, Chair of Compass, says:

The mission of government should be to unleash the energy and potential of everyone to transform their workplaces, communities and lives.

There is a growing awakening throughout the world. The story of Syriza in Greece has much in common with Spain's Podemos and Scotland's Independence Campaign. Jeremy Corbyn's surprise bid to lead and transform the UK Labour party is attracting rapidly growing support, especially from younger people. It is part of the widespread rejection of the economic policies of the past thirty-five years and distaste for the behaviour of political leaders. More is to come.

People are realising that capitalism and democracy in their current forms are failing us. There is a growing rebellion against the current order. Younger people, angry about the

injustice of their situation, are opting out of conventional politics and exploring new ways of bringing about change, often bottom up, and creating new businesses. Politics as we know it is a side-show. The mainstream is happening outside party politics and the daily news. There is a huge discourse on the internet that many people are unaware of. All over the world people are seeking alternatives. You will read about it in this book.

The need for visionary leadership at every level is greater than ever before. Patriarchal top-down leadership is obsolete. People want enabling leadership that releases human creativity and bottom - up change. But major transformation will not take place unless many more people get involved and demand change. Far more pressure is needed.

Depending on the choices we make collectively and individually, we could be at the beginning of a benign revolution or a breakdown of society leading to extremism. This particularly applies to people who feel excluded. Young women and men travel to Syria; others drop out.

I listen to a lot of people in all walks of life in many countries (Chapter 1). What they told me inspired me to write this book. Many are disheartened, angry about the current situation and feel powerless. Following the results of the recent UK General Election they are even angrier and more disheartened. It is outrageous that a first past the post voting system results in an unrepresentative parliament and a Tory government with less than 37% of the vote, representing 24% of the population, continues to inflict extreme policies upon the nation without a mandate. If they do not take this into account there will be a lot of strife.

Already numerous demonstrations are taking place; many more are planned.

Until nations have properly representative government things are unlikely to change significantly for the better.

A lot more of us need to get angry. Anger should never be acted out, but it provides the passion and energy needed for constructive change. The fact is: we need a non- violent revolution – not just in the UK but all over the West. We should be grateful that we can protest, usually without being imprisoned, tortured or shot. Also we have the rule of law.

*The future has already arrived. It's just not evenly distributed yet. **William Gibson***

This future could bring a massive transfer of power away from the grip of government and big business to ordinary people and their local communities, if we choose to make it happen. Being cynical or pessimistic won't help.

The 21st Century Revolution is already happening. Every century has its revolutions, political and industrial. The first two industrial revolutions were based on coal, then oil and gas. The third may be based on solar power, hi-tech, bioscience, the World Wide Web, personal and collective empowerment and the need to respond to ecological disaster.

In his book, *An Optimist's Tour of the Future*, Mark Stevenson gives an exciting account of emerging scientific and technological innovations likely to transform our lives and the world as we know it. Many are benign. Undoubtedly, many of these developments will bring enormous benefits, particularly in the area of human health. They could reduce costs and devolve power. However, I am cautious; they could result in the even greater concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few and further alienation of human beings from Nature of which we are part. And these developments will not help unless we are determined to resolve economic inequality, entrenched power structures and act on the urgent need to conserve and sustain a living planet. The danger is we'll be deluded by techno-fixes.

Systems thinking Central to this book is the idea that the immense challenges we face require whole system change, not partial fixes. Everything is interconnected; we are part of one whole; we are part of Nature; we are all one. Systems thinking is the process of understanding how systems influence one another within a whole. It is an approach to problem solving in which problems are seen as parts of an overall system. Thus rather than reacting to specific parts, as political leaders tend to, with the danger creating unintended consequences, we need to look at the whole system and identify the fundamental issues before creating solutions.

So **Part One** is a whole system analysis of the current situation. **Part Two** offers a new, better future and explores how all of us can make it happen. It includes comprehensive proposals for addressing:

- Climate Chaos and Destruction of the Eco-system
- Economic Injustice
- Resolving Conflict without Violence
- Radical Reform of broken and corrupt, top down Politics
- And, that key part, what you the reader will do

All of which form an inter-related system.

Whilst many of these proposals call for international collaboration, some are specific to the UK, yet equally relevant to other nations. Countries learn from each other.

The next few years are likely to be full of surprises. In the UK, the voting system has deprived many people of their wishes. Of almost 31 million people who voted in the recent general election on the 7th May, 19 million voted for losing candidates. That's 63% of voters who backed a candidate that didn't win, making the majority of voters feel unrepresented. Out of 650 winning candidates, 322 (49%) got less than 50% of the vote.

The Westminster Village is discredited. That was the clear message of the Scottish referendum. People will vote if they believe it will make a difference. An unprecedented 97% registered to vote in the referendum and 84.6% voted, including 16 to 17 year olds for the first time. It was the highest vote in the UK since the introduction of universal suffrage. This has increased the pressure for reform. 44.7% voted for independence. As I write,

elections are to be held in Spain, Poland, Denmark, Finland, Portugal and Estonia. Debt and austerity have played a major part in creating a desperate situation in Greece. The Greek election was a strong vote of no confidence in the current economic doctrine. At the time of writing the results of negotiations between the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and the EU are unknown but are likely to be far-reaching.

We need a great power shift – a peaceful revolution. A revolution is swelling at the moment, as evidenced by widespread and growing protests. They will grow. I hope this book will give many people the desire to participate at an epic moment in human history. Currently power is held by elites who will obstruct anything they think adversely affects their interests. We need a shift of power to people and communities, enabled by a new kind of slimmer state. We, 7bn people, need to use our power; otherwise little will change.

This book is a call to ordinary people to be great. Through your relationships with others, you can help create the critical mass required to bring about this great transformation. We can be sure revolution will come from the power and creativity of millions of people. If you are not already involved, I invite you to become part of it. If you are part of it, I hope reading this book will give you even greater power. Being well informed gives people power; it's essential for an effective democracy; people won't be well informed if they rely on old media. I endeavour to make sense of the biggest crisis humanity has ever faced. I describe the radical changes that are needed and suggest what you can do to help.

In the Resources at the end of the book I offer you many different ways in which you can play your part. There are suggestions at the end of some chapters. References and links are provided conveniently in the text rather than at the end of the book. Hyperlinks are provided in the e-book version. I have quoted from writings that I believe are particularly useful or articulate, thus introducing you to people you may wish to follow, and sources of further information.

Bruce Nixon October 2015