Fundamental System Change for Global Sustainability and Justice

By Dr Richard Mochelle

Growing understanding of our serious and intractable global problems has led me, and a growing number of us, to an unsettling realisation. The political and economic systems into which we were born, which we did not choose, appear tragically inadequate to the task of fulfilling and protecting our common security interests.

So, more and more people are talking about fundamental system change. Some of us have been talking about it since the 1970's, since books like 'limits to growth' hit the streets, since Fritjof Capra's Turning Point, and Gerard Diamond's Collapse. Compared to the time of the French, American and Russian revolutions, we now have the Internet and much more informed and educated critical mass.

If fundamental system change is necessary, the question facing us now is - how to make it happen peacefully this time, without the violence, destruction and terror of previous revolutions? How to do it gradually without imposing on the uncomprehending and disinterested public? How might we do it without confining ourselves to the political system pathways laid down for us by our constitutional forefathers?

The situation may '**appear**' hopeless. It may seem that we **are trapped** in a global system, an unchosen economic and political reality that is unchangeable. It may **appear** so, but that appearance is illusory.

The social system does not exist '**out there'** in the ether. The political economy does does not exist in the trees and the minds of the kangaroos. The system exists only in human minds, in your mind, in our collective minds. The system will remain in power only so long as the content of our minds remains unchanged. We will be trapped by it only so long as we think like infants, that we have no choice but to continue consenting, acquiescing, conforming to what was bequeathed by our forefathers. It will retain its power over us only so long as we continue to believe that we have neither right, nor intelligence, nor capability to fundamentally change it.

If and when that mistaken belief is overturned, the gateway to the transformation will open. Its opening should not lead us not to think that the existing system must be torn down with acts of violence as Karl Marx advocated. We would do well to learn from the story of the 3 piggies. If our system is a vulnerable house of straw, some of us piggies need to co-design and construct a new and better structure alongside the old, and showcase its protective properties. Only then should we advise en-masse exodus from the old to the new. Meanwhile, we must care for and try to improve the existing structure, as inadequate as it is.

We now have the internet to engage multitudes of social change thinkers and activists to design, constitute, bring forth and reality-test new model global systems. A considerable learning curve lies ahead of us. We have never engaged in a web-based democratic, world constitution building process

before. Our schooling has not prepared us for it. There is no suitable platform yet to enable it. There are no experienced guides. This is unfamiliar territory for everyone.

For some 3 decades I have been quietly scouting ahead to explore this territory. While reading widely to find useful clues and worthwhile directions, I have at the same time in my bumbling, trial and error way, attempted to guide many small exploratory groups along what I imagined were promising pathways. I've engaged people from the ages of 8 to 80, in primary, secondary, tertiary colleges, homes and community meeting places.

Having done all this, I still can't claim to be an expert. I'm still naïve about the future, because I've not experienced it. None of us have. I take comfort in knowing that all of us are more or less naïve bozos on this bus. We've never been to where we are going. This is one thing we can know for certain.

It takes a mental stretch to think outside the familiar moral-linguistic box – to explore beyond the world of international affairs and the idea of national military defence systems, the realities of representative democracy and party politics, the competitive market place, the property system, rental, mortgage, and tax payments, commuting to work, unemployment, and so forth.

Einstein said that *you can't solve a problem with the kind of consciousness that gave rise to the problem".* Well, this is not always the case. But what do we do when the case holds true? It's actually very hard to conceive of fundamentally new kinds of systems using the language of old. The language frames our consciousness.

But consider this: in competitive games we switch languages easily. Consider how easily we move from say a football game with its set of rules and words – to play chess without carrying the football words with us. A different set of words is used for each game. There is no reason why this cannot be done when we are thinking about alternative systems. To enable myself to do it, I have had to invent new words.

What I found so encouraging on my 3 decade experiment is that given the right conditions, most people are able mentally to explore beyond our crisis-prone, reality trap. Typically they imagine a much transformed future world. Unfortunately they rarely felt sufficiently empowered to continue travelling to explore the practical implications. I have many stories to tell here, but time today will not permit.

My concern for the last decade has been – how to activate their system choices and imaginings? How can we get people to come together and commit the substantial time needed for the transformative learning journey to bring to practical fruition their sketchy imaginings and showcase their system choices?

What are the essential, personal and collaborative steps that we - who see need for fundamental system change - must take practically, and non-violently, to bring forth a preferred, sustainably secure world system?

Before I present my work in progress findings, I think it would be valuable to see to what extent people here are on the same page in respect to the challenge of system transformation.

Slide 3   questions on fundamental change >>>

My question to you is this: Do you think that achieving long term sustainability will require fundamental system change – a whole system transformation?   Please, just for a moment, overlook the possibility that we may have completely different understandings of what this may mean and imply. I would like you to:

STAND UP IF you are convinced that 'whole system transformation' – however you understand it – is certainly needed to achieve a sustainable future.

If you're not sure, or not convinced, but very open to considering the possibility – STAY SEATED, JUST PUT YOUR HAND UP HIGH.

DON'T MOVE, don't stand or put your hand up, if you believe that whole system change is **completely unnecessary**.   DON'T MOVE if you are in a fog about all of this.

OK, thankyou. STAY as you are for a moment longer. A question to those who are standing and have hands up. Lets get a crude indication of what you might mean by whole systems transformation.

Click 1   STAY AS YOU ARE IF you think that whole systems transformation means radically changing our physical sub-systems - say transforming our entire cities, and perhaps the whole urban and rural landscape, or even just our whole energy systems, and/or, the food system. Stay as you are if you think whole institutions like the banking system needs transforming.

NOW KEEP STANDING, & HANDS UP if you believe that whole system transformation **also** implies fundamental change to - the whole international political and economic system, an eventual end to the competitive market, the tax system, the property system, the military nation-state system. Are you considering a major ethical transformation - indeed an integrity revolution?   SIT DOWN, HANDS DOWN if you think that's going way too far, too unrealistic, beyond human nature, that we need go no further than physical systems transformation, as in number 1.

Thankyou. My talk is primarily, but not solely, targeted at those whose limbs are getting tired, who remain standing or have their hands up. I'm looking for recruits willing to commit to an intensive, transformative learning journey. By intensive, I mean something equivalent in commitment to a full-time university course, prefaced perhaps by introductory workshops. I'm keen to see one or more groups on the Sunshine Coast & hinterland take a pioneering lead.

Those of you needing no more convincing that fundamental system change is necessary, will be confronted by this ethical question – how are you going to 'be the change', or, more precisely, 'the system change'?

Clearly you can't exemplify a whole system change on your own.

What collaborative steps will you take when your ethical conscience nags you to make the plunge and 'be the system change that you want to see'?

Here are the key steps on the transformative learning journey that I reckon we all need to take.

Don't try to read it all now.

I will move briefly through each of these learning steps in turn, to help you see where you are currently located in respect to the path ahead

Most of you will have reached step 1, or you wouldn't be here today. Here people are become aware of the serious predicament facing us. Here are people trying to join the dots between the multiple interacting factors - the symptoms and the causes – trying to gain a big picture view, trying to comprehend the complex interactions between the political, economic, ecological and educational domains.

Here we may be talking about the crises happening **right now** - the destruction of forests, species extinction, the brutality, rape, torture and indiscriminate killing being experienced everyday in our world – far from Sunshine Coast coffee crowd.

At step 1 are writers producing books to alert us to the predicament.

click – click .

People are blogging and lecturing, communicating their awareness over dinner tables and coffee tables around the world, raising our awareness of the impending crises invoked by peak oil and peak minerals, climate change and population growth. Here are developing movements incensed over the poverty and gross injustices in the world.

Click, click – final books. Here are people alerting us to **the dangerous proliferation** of weapons in the world – waiting to be plundered and unleashed if we fail to respond effectively to the sustainability challenge.

Today, at step 1, we will hear Nicole Foss alerting us to the parlous financial situation in the world.

The whole mess can be overwhelming to comprehend. How to respond?

Step 2

Some of our best people are responding to the most serious, present crises, to rescue the wounded, relieve the suffering, prevent forest destruction, stop the destructive mining, save the endangered creatures, etc. Here we find thousands of agencies – prominent among them being the Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, Oxfam, Greenpeace, etc.

Those on the coalface, who daily witness the destruction, suffering and grief, are often those most convinced of the need for fundamental system change.

Step 3

This step does not necessarily come after step 2. It could be an alternative step 2. A great army is building here, committed to the sustainability challenge. People here are engaged with the everyday world of politics, policy making, policy research and political influencing across a broad range of areas concerned with sustainability, social justice, and political security. Here millions of agencies, research centres, education courses, and advocacy groups around the world are chipping away at the edges of the predicament.

Many people here believe that judicious policy change can solve the world's serious, most intractable problems, even such problems as the 'economic growth versus ecological limits' dilemma.

Camping here are growing numbers of green designers producing wonderful sustainable products for the global market. Here we find our sustainability professionals advising companies how to improve competitiveness and profit through adopting these green innovations, recycling, water and energy efficient design. Located here are those selling the idea of triple bottom accounting to the corporations. Here we find micro-financing initiatives designed to enable the poor to set up small businesses and get a foot-hold in the competitive economy.

And here we find transition town initiatives, permaculture and ecovillage movements.

More often than not, actors at this level overlook the fundamental ethical and systemic causative drivers of ecological, political and economic unsustainability. They either believe that the international military and market system is fundamentally fine, or if not, see no way of changing it, and/or see no profit or paid employment in trying to change it.

Many campers here think that **if only** the world's population could be reduced, everything will be alright, or if only we switched to renewable energy, **if only** some of the billions spent on military defence could be diverted to feed the poor, **if only** we all practised permaculture, our problems would be largely solved.

However, seen from the higher levels, what is happening on this step is myopic. By ignoring system drivers of the predicament, people here are reinforcing the system.

Much of what happens at this level is valuable. However given the urgencies, the swelling numbers partying on this plateau need a good nudge to take the next step to comprehend the systemic causes of the predicament and acknowledge their causative role and responsibility.

Step 4   Deep Cause Recognition

It hardly needs saying that until we apprehend the deepest causes of the predicament, it will continue to get worse. While this may seem patently obvious, the time given to this so far has seemed inversely proportional to its importance.

We have a steep learning step here. Despite the crucial value of the learning and self development that occurs here, you'll find that few sustainability courses at universities will take you trekking up these slopes. Professional career and employment prospects begin to thin out up here, and students may fear

that they won't be able to recoup their education expenses. Start climbing here and even the concept of a professional career begins to look problematic.

Step 4 will have you peering into the deep crevices – shining a critical light into long buried, unexamined layers of assumptions and taken for granted beliefs – to identify the very bottom line causes. No simple challenge. Your search may plunge you into moral, political, environmental and economic philosophy. Sadly, bookshops in shopping malls typically have no shelves on this subject, and very few people are here to talk about it. Hopefully, you might help change this situation soon.

At this level, we come to recognise the extent to which the whole system is a cause. More importantly perhaps, we discover that underpinning the system, are the fundamental ethics of the system, ethics that we live out daily, habitually, and fail to critically examine.

The **crucial insight and recognition at this step, is** that the system is not 'out there', in the ether, imposing on us from on high. Here we come to recognise that   **we are the system**,   **we impose it on each other**. The philosopher – Thomas Pogge – has been hammering out this point in numbers of papers and books, his message is not getting out. The implications are unsettling. Once we recognise that we are imposing the system on each other, we can hold each other to account. We can no longer hide by a veil of anonymity and silent acquiescence.

At this step we recognise our own accountability for the tragic war in Syria, and the millions of refugees it has produced. We could point out there and blame the failure of the inter-national system and the paralytic UN security council. But who is it that supports the system? Who quietly consents to it? We all do.   Here at the fundamental bottom of the system is a deluded, tribalistic practice of ethnic and nationalistic identity-branding, a practice that we all participate in, dividing ourselves and our kids from human beings in other parts of the world. Merely by calling ourselves and others Australian, we affirm and reinforce the practice. By paying our taxes, we contribute to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We are not blameless innocents here. By silently acquiescing to this tribalistic, militaristic world system, allowing tyrants and warlords to build military forces and murder and torture citizens with impunity, we are all complicit. We are contributing to the suffering and we may be next when the world's financial, energy and food systems collapse.

No, you didn't create the system, and can't be blamed for it. But here, at step 4, you come to recognise that you, and all of us, are causatively responsible for every minute that it **continues** to remain in place.

When your full recognition of this takes full affect, emotionally, as well as intellectually, the transformative gateway begins to open. The next step through the gateway and upward seems a little one. But there's a big transformative challenge ahead – without career and profit-making prospects. If we are causatively responsible for the failed system, it follows that we have a system corrective responsibility.

Step 5   System corrective responsibility

Acknowledging our corrective responsibility has immense implications for how we decide our time commitment priorities from here on. We have an immense learning challenge ahead, one that I've found requires a substantial time commitment. Occasional weekend workshops, or once a fortnight meetings, will not cover the territory in my experience. If we are serious about transformative system change, the learning journey needs to be regarded as a full-time, undistracted, no-looking-back commitment. We are talking here about a transformative experience.

Tragically, very few people – not even those around us who are passionate about sustainability are stepping up to this challenge. Most are partying back at step 3

At step 5, the summit comes into view, the point at which we must converge with seriously committed others to agree on the constitution of the new system. But the summit seems so distant, such a long way to trek. What if the financial collapse happens meanwhile? And there are so few people here – and there's no one paying me to persist – so why bother?

It will take considerable emotional intelligence and ethical fortitude to take a lead responsibility, free oneself as much as possible from one's money-making priorities, cut down one's needs to a bare minimum – very hard if you've a dependent family - and commit priority time to the learning journey ahead.

Step 6   explore and compare new system options

Having more or less accepted some system corrective responsibility, you will now be committing an increasingly large slab of time to an exploration of alternative system design options. Wikipedia has recently offered a useful list of alternative economic systems, from radical, moneyless systems to less radical ones. Apart from the variations on socialism, you'll come across less well know systems like Georgism, Prout, Parecon, Priocracy.   You'll also be discovering and exploring the catalogue of alternative democracy models.   You'll find demarchy, sociocracy, the bahai system, variations on cosmopolitan democracy and the Earth Constitution

Comparing the merits of these systems and their underpinning ethical principles is quite an undertaking – very difficult if you try to maintain neutrality and have no self-determined criteria by which to compare.

So sooner or later, you'll be ploughing through the catalogues of alternative ethical principles to determine your own ethical platform by which to assess the merits of the alternatives and upon which to provisionally design or choose your preferred system.

By the time you get to this level you will have come to realise that you can't 'be the change' on your own; yes, you can shift from driving a car to riding a bicycle, but you cannot be the system change on your own. You cannot on your own exemplify a new property system, or a new political system. To be the change, you will need to converge with multiple subscribers who declare commitment to the same system vision.

At this level you will be seeking to join a system design alliance, to collaborate in developing system design ideas, an alliance dedicated to trekking together, engaging in system simulation gaming, and preparing for the constitution-building summit.

Your growing interest in preparing for this will see you advance to the next, challenging learning step.

Step 7 Decide Rules of Engagement

While fellow trekkers will be committed to constituting a sustainable new system, they are unlikely initially to agree on system design preferences. Reaching constitutional agreement could prove highly conflictual, even impossible, without prior agreement on rules of engagement.

Participants won't want to engage if others are disrespectful, unreasonable, dominating, and unwilling to think impartially in consideration of the interests of all people as well as the protection of the Earth and its diverse habitats and species.

In anticipation of our future world constitutional engagement at the summit, I have been working for over a decade with multiple groups to build consensus on 'rules of engagement' - a set of discourse ethical principles and practical procedures. What has emerged is a booklet-size document - an ethical process charter which we have been referring to as – a draft metaconstitution – or Metacon for short.

I am now working on progressing the Metacon project with a sixth group involving two friends and colleagues here today – Murray Lane, who will be speaking later, and the very tall Neil Davidson who will be helping out later.

As those who get involved come to understand that the learning task involved in familiarising oneself with the rules of engagement is tantamount to undertaking a introductory course in applied moral philosophy. At this step we get a pretty good insight into the amazing logic structure involved in moral reasoning, and a solid grounding for the next stage.

Step 8 Preparatory deliberation

Memorising the rules of engagement is one thing. Knowing how to apply them capably is another.

At this stage we engage in preparatory deliberation. Here we practice applying the rules with novices like oneself to build tentative agreement on preferred world system norms and attempt to build convincing arguments in support of our preferences in preparation for our participation at the summit.

I have taken a number of exploratory groups up to this point to give them a preview of the learning challenge involved.

My own progress has stalled at this step. I am close to being prepared for the next step. I have thought through a system design which I call Priocracy, and am close to being ready to put it on the negotiation table. But in order for me to advance, I need to find a few people who also have prepared themselves for the summit negotiation to proceed.

Step 9 World Constitutional Summit

Here is the world transforming, constitutional moment that humanity has been evolving toward – a moment made possible by the distance-collapsing technology of the internet – a moment finally when human beings can consciously participate in determining a protective world system of their own design, unencumbered by the colonial and nationalist military powers of history.

In the first instance, this will involve the pioneers, those most responsive to the predicament, people from all backgrounds willing to take the responsible lead, to serve on behalf of all, as impartial, world protective constitution makers.

The demand for consistency and impartiality will require participants to be prepared to publicly assert the right not to belong to any nation, relinquish their national allegiance, and commit instead to the world constitution of their own design. When this controversial stand is taken by people around the world in unison – using the full suite of social media tools now available - the global transformation will begin in earnest.

Step 10   Constitutional Commitment

The new global constitutional arrangements will be legitimate only for participants at the summit who consciously commit to them. The constitution will not be imposed on the world's people. By the same token, its legitimacy will not depend on voting at the UN assembly, nor by national electorates. How then might the new system be introduced? The answer is offered by nature. Nature's new species do not get elected in into the world. New species enter the world via tiny seeds, embryos and viruses. Planted in receptive, nurturing environments they will grow, and reproduce. Sometimes they grow to become the dominant species.

Participants emerging from the summit will consort to form new exemplar civic bodies that embody their agreed world constitutional norms and arrangements. At the end stage of this major learning journey, this rite of passage to adulthood, they can finally be the change, the system change, they want to see in the world

By internalising the new constitutional norms and arrangements, participants themselves will be transformed, in effect, to serve as the brain cells of a new species of organic global system with a developing global brain.

Empowered by the collective intelligence of a well-constituted, global consortium, we will be able to achieve tomorrow what we can barely contemplate achieving today on our own.

We will be able to begin the rurban transformation – the reconstruction of the urban and rural landscape into low energy, cellular configurations, that worm their way through the underproductive rural hinterlands, enriching the soils with their water and nutrient catching abilities, dramatically increasing the carrying capacity of the regions. Murray Lane will say something about this later today. Today, planning regulations will not permit this kind of development. With the global expertise that can

be marshalled by a well constituted global consortium, it will be far easier to attract governments, local authorities and farmers to get behind this kind of development.

If you want to be part of this kind of world system transformation, and showcase the system change you want to see, you've a challenging learning journey ahead of you.

I'm hoping that there will be at least a handful of you here today, willing to do what it takes and begin without delay.

Join me at my roundtable, and we'll explore how to begin. Thankyou.