

Climate Prosperity:

Why Marx Was Wrong and Mother Nature Is Right

by Marc A. Weiss

DURING THE 1840S, TWO YOUNG GERMAN SCHOLARS, KARL MARX AND FREDERICK Engels, APPLIED GEORGE HEGEL'S dialectical philosophy of history to economics and politics. They envisioned modern history in three distinct phases:

Phase 1 *Economy*: agricultural feudalism and urban mercantilism
Governance: monarchy or dictatorship

Phase 2 *Economy*: industrial capitalism
Governance: monarchy or dictatorship, with limited experiments in democracy

Phase 3 *Economy*: industrial socialism/communism
Governance: proletarian dictatorship

While Marx and Engels later strongly supported European Social Democratic political parties and movements, they never modified their basic historical framework. They could not envision in 1848 how democratic capitalism would provide unprecedented human freedom, civil rights, and economic opportunities for millions of people worldwide by 2009. Once people taste the fruits of liberty, they never want to return to living with tyranny.

This one simple explanation, more than any other factor, accounts for the dramatic decline of communist and socialist ideologies during the past three decades, as I discovered while working in Prague after the Velvet Revolution.

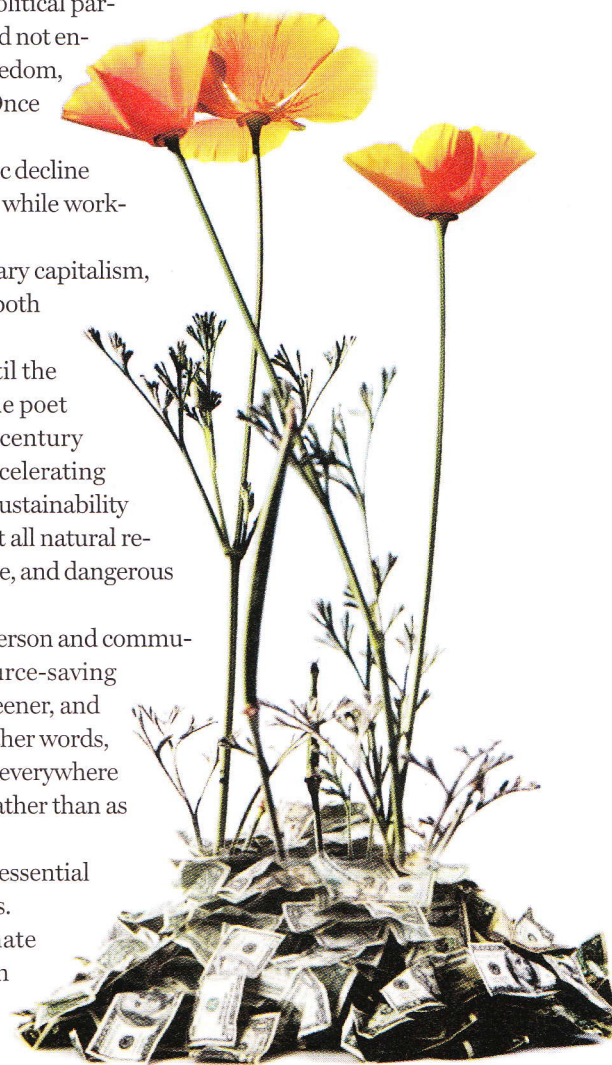
It later turned out, as we now know, that there is a big problem with contemporary capitalism, namely the massive and inefficient utilization of a wide variety of natural resources both for industrial production and for human consumption.

Resource depletion and environmental challenges were generally ignored until the second half of the twentieth century. Only a few earlier commentators such as the poet William Blake raised concerns about industrialization (Blake called nineteenth-century British textile factories "dark Satanic mills"). It took until the 1960s for rapidly accelerating physical damage, diminishing supplies, and rising costs to finally place the issue of sustainability on the global policy agenda. Climate change is really just the tip of the iceberg in that all natural resources—land, water, air, and materials—are becoming increasingly scarce, expensive, and dangerous to continue using so excessively and wastefully.

Fortunately it is not too late to create an even higher standard of living for every person and community throughout the world, by shifting from resource-wasting capitalism to resource-saving capitalism. In the twenty-first century, the only way to get richer is by becoming greener, and the only way to earn more money is by using fewer resources and reusing more. In other words, the global economy can significantly enhance prosperity and quality of life for people everywhere by treating Mother Nature as our good friend and one of our most precious assets, rather than as our enemy to be exploited and conquered.

The main challenge is for each of us to acknowledge the ancient wisdom of two essential values: 1) new is not always better than old; and 2) more is not always better than less.

Global Urban Development (the group that I lead) is coordinating the Climate Prosperity Project, whose core belief is that "innovation, efficiency, and conservation in the use and reuse of all natural and human resources is the best way to increase jobs, incomes, productivity, and competitiveness." The project's main purpose is



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to creatively use business sustainability concepts taken from Paul Hawken, Amory and Hunter Lovins, Peter Senge, Karl-Henrik Robert, William McDonough, Daniel Esty, and the McKinsey Global Institute, as applied by companies such as GE, IBM, Toyota, IKEA, DuPont, Google, Nike, and Apple.

This model has three key elements:

- 1) Green Savings—reducing waste and cutting costs;
- 2) Green Opportunities—expanding jobs and businesses by raising revenues and increasing market share;
- 3) Green Talent—investing in fundamental assets including technology, infrastructure, and most importantly, modern entrepreneurial and workforce skills, because people are now the world's most vital economic resource.

Through state, regional, and local Climate Prosperity Strategies, places like Silicon Valley and the State of Delaware are now using the three-part business sustainability model to promote economic development that saves money, creates jobs, raises incomes, and keeps us all safe from environmental harm. This spring the International Economic Development Council will publish the Climate Prosperity Guidebook, describing the various strategies and explaining how to develop and implement such approaches most effectively.

Currently there is talk of a Climate Prosperity Agreement that will be part of the United Nations Copenhagen Treaty in 2009, with developed countries committing to invest 1 trillion dollars in developing countries over the next decade to build renewable energy and clean technologies, enabling living standards to rise and poverty to be eliminated through sustainable innovation and resource efficiency. These investments will generate substantial economic and employment growth for every nation throughout the world.

The bottom line is that Marx and Engels were wrong, because the real three-phase historical dialectic is as follows:

Phase 1 Pre-industrial sustainability

Phase 2 Resource-wasting industrialization

Phase 3 Innovative, efficient, sustainable, inclusive, democratic, resource-saving industrialism

Now that we can envision a healthier, more peaceful, and prosperous future in harmony with Mother Nature, let's all thank her for showing us the one and only path that can definitely ensure our grandchildren will thrive. ■