Economic & Ecologic Transformation—There Is No Alternative

written by Jill Stein | February 1, 2014

It's very humbling to be in this room, not to mention on this stage, with all the vision and dedication that's packed within these four walls. Thanks to the board and Seth Adler, the volunteers, and all of you here tonight for making this conference happen.

I was asked to say a few words from my perspective as a medical doctor working in the area of health and the environment. So first I want to explain what that perspective is. Having started out as a clinical doctor in conventional medicine, I discovered I wasn't comfortable giving people pills and sending them back out to things that are making us sick—everything from pollution to poverty, sick food, dirty car-centered transportation, and so on. So I moved upstream to environmental health, and learned pretty quickly there's no way to transform the environment—to make it safe and healthy—without an economic transformation, that is, greening and democratizing the economy. And to do that requires fundamentally challenging power.

So now when people ask me what kind of medicine I practice I say political medicine, because politics is the mother of all illnesses. We've got to fix that sick political system if we want to fix everything else that's killing us. My medical license board was a little puzzled by this—namely why I got arrested three times over the past year in the practice of "political medicine." Thankfully, they have allowed me to keep my license. So far at least.

So I'd like to share some thoughts from that perspective of political medicine—on how we can achieve ecologic and economic transformation. To cut to the chase, we can do that by using the strength of our numbers—as the 99%—and the authority of our agenda that already has majority support. In other words, I'm here to encourage us to use the power we already have, to achieve that transformation we deserve—on which our survival depends.

I want to make three points.

First, I want to point out the obvious—that we are in an incredible, historic moment. And that makes economic and ecologic transformation a very real possibility. Thanks to everyone here for all you've done to bring us to this moment.

Democracy and justice are breaking out all around us—from the democracy revolutions in the middle east, the Occupy and austerity uprisings, the tar sands blockade, the teacher and student protests—from Puerto Rico to Quebec and Cooper Union, in the high schools from Philadelphia to Seattle—to the Wal-Mart and fast food strikes, eviction blockades, the Idle No More campaign, the fights to stop fracking, nuclear power, and the millions—literally—that filled the streets last week to stop that poster child of predatory capitalism—Monsanto—that's poisoning of our food, farms, biosphere, and democracy. People are standing up like we haven't seen in generations.

This movement is long overdue. But it's also just in time for us to make this a powerful tipping point to take back the promise of democracy and the peaceful, just, green future we deserve. And that is why it's now possible to take on economic and ecological transformation.

The more united we are behind a broad agenda of economic and ecologic transformation, the quicker we'll get there. As you know, the 1% cannot rule the 99% without the game of divide and

conquer. But our being here today defies that game, and allows us to create a more unified, effective mobilization.

Standing up to power requires not only standing up to the capitalist establishment, but to its political parties as well. Capitalism thrives on the politics of fear, and we've been told for decades to vote our fears rather than our values. But the reality is that the politics of fear has brought us everything we were afraid of—from the off-shoring of our jobs, to the massive Wall Street bailouts, the endless expanding wars, the attack on our civil liberties, and the meltdown of the climate. We must replace the politics of fear with the politics of courage—in the street and in the voting booth. We must lead the way on what we deserve. The political establishment is not going to.

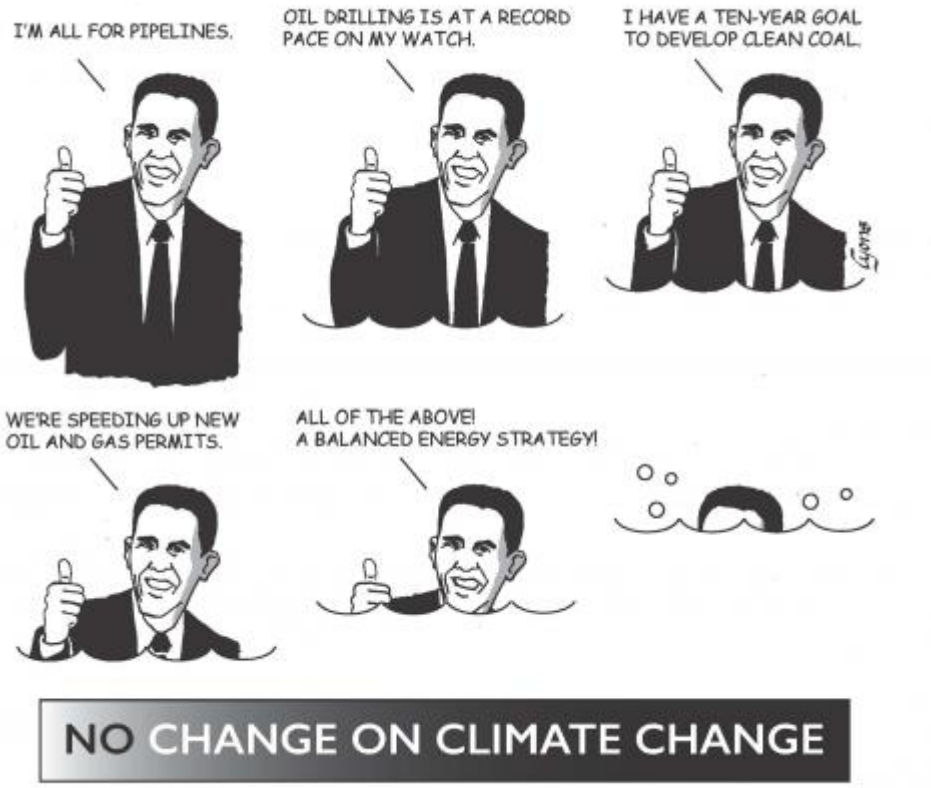
And by the way, this is not a contest between economy and ecology to see which is more important. That's like asking whether your heart or your lungs are more critical to your survival. They are both essential. And they are both so enmeshed with each other, we can't fix one unless we also fix the other.

If you try to fix the economy and let the environment unravel, you won't have water to cool the engines, food to feed our families, or climate security from storms, drought, and floods that allows you to set up shop or even live safely. Conversely, if you try to fix the environment without fixing the economy, people will of necessity take down the trees, over-graze the land, and destroy the environment—in the desperate struggle to survive.

In addition, it's not just economy and ecology that are under siege. So are peace and democracy, which are also intimately connected to economy and ecology. The military, for example, is the biggest source of greenhouse gases and conversely, securing/stealing fossil fuels from the third world is the biggest driver of the U.S. war machine. The military is also the biggest drain of U.S. dollars away from human needs, while it's also a major engine of the U.S. economy. And the absence of real democracy is what really prevents us from implementing the solutions the American people already support: bringing the troops home, downsizing the military, greening the economy, and putting people back to work.

Piecemeal solutions aren't going to solve this. We've got to fix them all. And we *can* do that because the solutions are not only compatible, they are profoundly synergistic and interdependent.

The second point I'd like to make is that this transformation is not only possible. It's essential. In fact, there is no alternative (to borrow a phrase from Margaret Thatcher). Climate science makes this clear. So I want to say just a few words about that climate science, and why it compels emergency action now—for the climate and the economy.



In short, climate science tells us that warming triggers more warming. When certain physical conditions are hit—called tipping points—warming accelerates, which triggers more warming. This process will repeat itself until the climate change spirals into unlivable conditions. This is why we must prevent more warming than what we've already got. Here are some of the details of recent climate science that tend to light a fire under your feet.

An estimated 400,000 people are dying every year from climate change, including 1000 children a day, and $1.2 trillion a year is being lost from the global economy. These costs will grow rapidly if we allow the warming to continue.

- We've just had the warmest decade on record. In total, the climate has warmed 1½ degrees F since 1895, but 80 percent of that has occurred just since 1980. In other words, it's accelerating.
- The last two years broke all records for extreme weather.
- We now have established mega-drought in the West and South, which is predicted to be permanent.
- We're now having the second major wildfire of the season in California—the kind of fire you'd normally see at the end of a long hot dry summer. And now they're starting in the spring.
- The melting of ice sheets is accelerating. Sea level rose 8 inches last century, but is predicted to rise 6 feet in the next. Over five million people live within that amount of sea level rise in the U.S. alone.
- And all of this is caused by less than 1 degree C of warming. But we're predicted to have as much as 4 degrees warming by mid-century. At 4 degrees warming the production of rice and corn is reduced by about 40 percent. Heat waves that would drive the temperature to 105 degrees F under current conditions will drive the thermometer to 117 degrees—which is not survivable for people or livestock that many people rely on for food.

- The melting of the Greenland ice sheet has increased 5 times over in the last two decades. If the Greenland ice sheet were to collapse, sea level could rise 24 feet over a span of decades, not over thousands of years, as previously assumed. And that's only the beginning, because what makes Greenland melt is also making the Antarctic melt—and that would make sea level rise another 190 feet or so.
- And finally, carbon levels in the atmosphere are now at 400 ppm and rising. That's almost 50 percent higher than they were at the start of the industrial era in the 1800s, and higher than at any time over the last several million years. And this has happened in the blink of an eye in geologic time. When you see the graph of what this looks like, it becomes really clear why the climate is so desperately out of kilter, and why we cannot open up new fossil fuel sources—no fracking, no new offshore oil, no drilling in the Arctic or national parks, no tar sands excavation. We must not only stop the development of new fossil fuels. We must phase out existing fossil fuels as quickly as humanly possible.

The president's "all of the above" energy policy is disastrously misleading on this account. You've probably heard him declare his love for pipelines—saying in the debates, for example, "We've built enough pipeline to wrap around the entire earth once. . . *I'm all for pipelines…all for oil production. . .*" And then in the 2013 State of the Union address: "…my administration will keep *cutting red tape and speeding up new oil and gas permits.*" Obama justifies his expansion of fossil fuels with his "balanced approach" hype that implies that the harm of increasing fossil fuels is balanced by the growth of renewable energy. This is false. Fossil fuels are toxic to the climate. Period. You wouldn't give your child an "all of the above" diet—with pesticides, lead, and arsenic on one hand, and blueberries, spinach, and lentils on the other. Healthy food doesn't undo the damage of deadly poison. Same is true for energy. Clean renewable energy doesn't in any way prevent fossil fuels emissions from wrecking the climate. That's why we've got to move to a carbon-free economy as quickly as possible.

And fortunately we *can* do that, which is the final point I'd like to make. We can get off lethal fossil fuels at the same time we fix a whole host of economic ills. It does require systemic, transformational change and on an emergency basis. But it's not rocket science.

In the last election, we pulled some of these solutions together into a Green New Deal that has been the focus of Green Party work in the U.S. for years. And we continue to push for it in the Green Shadow Cabinet. With the political mobilization of the 99% for a Green New Deal, we could create 25 million jobs, end unemployment, democratize and green the economy, halt climate change, and make wars for oil obsolete.

With a Green New Deal we could create an Economic Bill of Rights that ensures:

- The right to employment through a nationally funded, locally controlled, direct jobs initiative replacing unemployment offices with employment offices.
- Workers rights for living wages, safe workplaces, and union representation.
- Medicare-for-All.
- Tuition-free, quality, public education from pre-school through college, and an end to student debt.
- The right to decent affordable housing, a halt to foreclosures and evictions, and expansion of rental and public housing.
- The right to accessible and affordable utilities—heat, electricity, phone, internet, and public transportation—through democratically run, publicly owned utilities that operate at cost, not for profit.
- The right to fair taxation in proportion to ability to pay—including a Wall Street transaction tax, taxing capital gains as income, and raising the income tax for the very wealthy to the

70-90 percent level.

Beyond an Economic Bill of Rights, we could create, through a Green New Deal, jobs in sustainable energy, conservation, regional organic food systems, clean manufacturing, and mass transit along with safe sidewalks and bike paths.

We could nationalize the Federal Reserve, break up big banks, and create public owned banks as non-profit utilities.

We could create economic democracy by providing support, education, and direct financing for worker cooperatives.

We could end taxpayer-funded bailouts for banks. We could create reforms for real democracy with full public financing and free and equal access to the airwaves.

We could revoke corporate personhood and restore the vote to ex-offenders; guarantee equal access to the ballot and to the debates for all qualified candidates; abolish the Electoral College and implement instant runoff voting and proportional representation.

We could—and must—also:

- Protect our civil liberties and security by repealing the Patriot Act and key sections of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).
- End the president's unconstitutional, imperial war powers, as well as the dictatorial power to assassinate (including U.S. citizens) and imprison without charge or trial.
- Prohibit Homeland Security and FBI from conspiring with police to suppress our freedoms of assembly and speech.
- End the war on the press and whistleblowers including Bradley Manning and Julian Assange.
- End the war on immigrants and the war on drugs.
- Cut military spending by 50 percent and close U.S. military bases around the world.

If there is a catastrophe in the making here, it is not really the climate. The real catastrophe is the myth of powerlessness that restrains us from fixing the eminently fixable climate and economic disasters being engineered by the 1%.

In fact we are powerful. To paraphrase Alice Walker, the biggest way people give up power is by not knowing we have it to start with. We have the support, the solutions, the values shared by the majority of people in this country and around the world. We have the power. We just have to stand up and assert it—in the street and in the voting booth. And we must get organized to do that effectively.

We are facing the breaking point for people, the planet, the economy, and our democracy. It's our job, our privilege, and perhaps our destiny, to turn that breaking point into the tipping point, and take back the peaceful, just, green future we deserve. And we can do that by mobilizing for economic and ecologic transformation, and settling for nothing less. We can go a long way to jump start this process, right here, right now, starting at this conference that brings the forces of economic and ecologic transformation together. Thank you for creating this critical convergence, and for all you are doing to make this transformation possible.