

Bioneers Conference 2011- No prescription without Proscription

Posted by Joan Russow
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From October 13-17, the 2011 Bioneers Conference entitled, from Breakdown to Breakthrough, took place, in San Raphael just outside San Francisco; the conference ran concurrently with the Occupy San Francisco and Occupy San Raphael -movements which were demanding fundamental structural and institutional change.

The Bioneers Conference is described, by the founders, as a “community of leadership” and as “an array of visionary change makers”. In preparing for the conference, I did a content analysis of the biographies of the presenters. The backgrounds, scope and experiences are clearly interdisciplinary. (i) **professions** professors, researchers, solicitors editors, legal organizations, anthropologists, biologists, medical doctors, entrepreneurs, film makers, media, founders and funders of NGOs, (ii) **scope: and experience;** local, regional, state, national and (iii) **) areas of expertise** ; education, sustainability, health, food, organic agriculture, climate change, biomimicry, environmental restoration, resilience, culture, social justice, human rights, indigenous rights, labour rights, feminism, cooperatives, social enterprises, eco-literacy, ecology alternative medicines, non-GMO choices.

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I noted that, in the biographies of the presenters, the most cited words and phrases describing the activities of the presenters were “sustainable” and “sustainability”. The question arises: Is it possible to have sustainability within a world of predominantly unsustainable institutes and practices without concurrently eliminating these practices?

At the conference, the presentations primarily profiled projects of positive change and although there were references to existing unsustainable government or corporate practices, the imperative to fundamentally change existing unsustainable practices as a precondition for moving from breakdown to breakthrough was absent.

Is it possible that the positive changes advanced by the **Bioneers** presenters can be sufficiently achieved without the fundamental structural and institutional change demanded by the Occupy Wall street groups? In other words would the showing of what is possible succeed without prohibiting the negative aspects that would normally impede the positive?

Perhaps we could draw a parallel with the cry reminiscent of the Boston tea party- no taxation without representation and coin the phrase “no prescription without proscription”.

The practice of proposing positive change and ignoring or bypassing the imperative to remove the preconditions preventing the fundament change is prevalent. The willingness to prescribe

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without proscribing is prevalent at the UN level.

At the CSD (Commission of Sustainable Development) many member states were willing to be prescriptive but were careful not to be “proscriptive”. For example, member states that produce and export genetically engineered food and crops, felt comfortable in stating the importance of promoting organic agriculture but, were not willing to call for the banning of genetically engineered food and crops; they ignored the often impossibility for the GE and the Organic crops to co-exist.

Similarly, at the Bioneers Conference the avoidance of proscription was evident . For example, the session on” *the Battle for Safe Food, public health and environmental Sovereignty with a focus on genetically engineered crops* illustrated the importance of proscription

Andrew Kimbrell and Jeffrey Smith documented excellent scientific data revealing the dangers of genetically engineered food and crops. I expected them both to be calling for the banning of GE food and crops and the removal, from the market, of products containing GE. I was surprised that they were calling for only labeling. Labeling addresses the right to know but neither the equity issue- everyone can afford to buy non-GE food, nor the environmental issue - genetic drift, nor the labour issue- the institution of a fair and just transition program for farmers and communities.

Being proscriptive at a Conference usually requires some form of statement demanding the end to, the banning of or the phasing out of the specific egregious practices or substances that impede the sustainability necessary for a “breakthrough”

At the Bioneers Conference, there was no provision at the end for a resolution or statement that could convey the need to fundamentally change existing corporate and government practices that are harmful to human health, that destroy the environment, that deny social justice, that violate human rights, including social and cultural rights, and civil and political rights, or that contribute to war and conflict.

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Apparently, there has never been a provision for a statement of demands that could be carried forth from the conference and assist those who recognize that substantial positive change can really only succeed with the prohibiting, phasing out of socially inequitable and environmentally unsound practices and substances. Statements of demands coming from a plenary of almost 3000 participants from a conference taking place in California could assist in moving from “breakdown to break through”.

For there to be a breakthrough, Bioneers have to not just profile positive projects and expose the breakdown but to demand that what causes the breakdown, be prohibited, banned or phased out.

At the end of the Conference, I proposed to Nina Simon, Co-CEO and founder of Bioneers, that there should be some provision for, statement of demands emerging from the Conference. She assured me that my suggestion would be taken into consideration. Such a statement emanating from a Conference of 3000 people, along with the extensive networks and broadcasts could facilitate a real breakthrough.

To a certain extent, Pam Rajput, in her presentation on the First Women’s parliament, demonstrated the importance of coming up with resolutions and statements.

ANNEX

Some draft suggestions of prescriptions.

NO PRESCRIPTIONS WITHOUT PROSCRIPTIONS

1.00 AVERTING ENVIRONMENTAL DEVASTATION AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

**End the exploitation of Nature affirmed in 1982 World Charter of Nature; every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to humans, and to accord other organisms such recognition's, humans must be guided by a moral code of action,*

Eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, particularly in industrialized countries; this pattern has contributed to poverty, to the inequitable distribution of resources within countries and between countries, has increased the vulnerability to natural disasters and has threaten the well-being of future generations.

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Reduce the ecological footprint that has contributed to a socially inequitable and environmentally unsound world; end the conversion of nature into a source of raw materials, and the practice of “built-in obsolescence”

End the reluctance to invoke the precautionary principle as a general and enforceable principle of law: *where there is a threat of irreversible harm the lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing measure to prevent the threat* .

End the application of the reverse onus strategy which places the onus not on the proponent of an intervention to prove safety but on the opponent, to demonstrate harm.

Prevent Natechs- natural disasters caused by technology or technological disasters caused by natural disasters and not rely on after-the fact attempts to reduce or mitigate disasters.

Ban, through the invoking the precautionary principle, the production and distribution of genetically engineered food and crops, the practice of biopiracy of genes of indigenous peoples ,the dumping of GE food and adventitious materials [living modified organisms] on developing countries. And remove off the shelves all processed foods containing genetically engineered material.

Ban Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) which are bioaccumulative and toxic, and which are capable of traveling long distances from their original source.

Prosecute countries for violating the transboundary principle that holds that states shall be held legally responsible for any pollution, in other states, caused by activities under their own jurisdiction.

End the practice of causing environmental devastation and then rely on restorative or clean-up technologies to remediate the environmental destruction rather than taking the preventive approach so as to avoid costly and inadequate subsequent measures to “rehabilitate” the site.

End the unsustainable forest management, the conversion of forests into agricultural land and the expansion of large-scale agro-industrial monocultures for food, fibre and, increasingly, energy.

End land degradation, soil erosion, salinization, water logging, and soil pollution, which contribute to loss of soil fertility.

End the strategy of substituting proposals of adaption to or offsetting of climate change rather than seriously addressing the issue of preventing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Phase out the use of fossil fuels, especially those from the unconventional sources such as the tar sands, reduce other greenhouse gas producing activities, ban fracking and end the substantial contribution to greenhouse gas emissions caused by methane gas resulting from the dependency on animal protein.

Discontinue the promoting of false “solutions” to climate change such as biofuels, large hydro projects, and nuclear energy which are not socially equitable and environmentally safe and sound renewable energy sources.

End the failure of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to investigate and estimate the full impact of greenhouse gas emissions by the military, and to demand that each state release information related to the greenhouse gas emissions from the production of all militarism, from military exercises, war games, weapons testing, military aviation troop transfer, military operations, and waste generation, to reconstruction after acts of violent interventions etc.

End the practice of member states relying not on the emerging scientific data, but on the IPCC 2007 report which was based on 2004 and 2005 data. The emerging data now indicates the urgency of keeping the rise in temperature below the dangerous level of 1 °C, [which is the point at which global systems on land, water and air will be so affected as to create vicious feedback cycles and destabilise many ecosystems and human societies]; whereas the IPCC 2007 Report had indicated that 2 degrees was the safe threshold. The emerging scientific data also indicates that there are more serious climate-induced events than anticipated in the 2007 IPCC Report.

End the climate injustice of using the atmospheric space of developing countries, and refusing to pay compensation

End the misappropriation of agricultural land for the growing of biofuel and contributing to food insecurity, and prohibit the purchase and use of land for biofuels to serve foreign markets and undermine food security.

Prohibit the practice, by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in violating the principle that a regulator must not be a promoter, of promoting civil nuclear energy.

Phase out the use of civil nuclear energy, and refuse to accept nuclear energy as the solution to climate change and delete Article IV of the NPT which bestows the inalienable right of states to access so-called "peaceful" use of nuclear energy.

Prevent the transfer to other states of substances and activities that are harmful to human health or the environment as agreed at the UN Conferences on the Environment and Development, 1992.

End the defiance by industrialized states, of principle 7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration which was adopted by all states at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). This principle states that:

“States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. (Principle 7, Rio Declaration)

□ *End environmentally induced diseases, address the social determinant of health problems- such as poverty, and provide universal access to a publicly-funded not-for-profit health non-two tier health care system .*

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Prevent the relocation *and transfer to other States of any activities and substances that cause severe environmental degradation or are found to be harmful to human health*
. (Principle 14 Rio Declaration, 1992)

End the use of the notion of 'prior consent" to persuade the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable countries or communities within developed countries to accept the dumping of products and substances that are potentially harmful to the environment and human health.

Prevent Pharmaceutical collusion between university and Pharmaceutical corporations. And end the policy of permitting Universities to sell products of research to corporations

End practice of the Pharmaceutical industry in creating new health problems to create market potential for new drugs

Prohibit the patenting of genes under the WTO TRIPS provision

End the misguided dependency on drugs when doctors fail to offer the possibility that change in life style could effectively address the health problem

Oppose the continued production and export of products that have been banned... or withdrawn

Prevent import of products banned or not yet approved in country of origin

2. CONTRIBUTING TO WAR AND CONFLICT

Delegitimize war- Given the social, environmental, health, human rights, economic consequences of war, under no conditions or circumstance is war legal or just.

End any attempt to undermine the international resolve to prevent the scourge of war; this would include not engaging in intimidation, in cajoling or in offering economic incentives in exchange for support for military interventions.

End the reluctance to abide by the 1975 Declaration on the Use of Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interests of Peace and for the Benefit of humanity.

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Dismantle the UN Security Council because it violates a fundamental principle in the Charter of the United Nations- the sovereign equality of states, and bestow more power to the UN General Assembly that does respect this principle.

End the misconstruing of Article 51 (self-defence) of the Charter of the United Nations to justify premeditated non-provoked military aggression, or to use various such pretexts for invading other sovereign states.

Abandon the guise of the pre-emptive/preventive attack policy that has resulted in aggressive attacks on sovereign states and that has been in violation of the Article 2 of United Nations and international law as being the 'supreme' international crime of a war of aggression.

End the practice of invoking Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations rather than invoking Chapter VI - the peaceful resolutions of disputes - and be prepared to be judged by the International Court of Justice.

End the practice of disrespecting of the jurisdiction and decisions of the International Court of Justice.

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Withdraw immediately from any military involvement and occupation of sovereign states.

End the trumping of health, environment, civil and political and human rights for the sake of "security, power and profit.

End the use of "human security" which has been extended to "humanitarian intervention", and used along with the "responsibility to protect" or with right to intervene with a view to justifying military intervention in other states.

True security is "common security", as defined in documents prepared by Olaf Palme, and which entrench peremptory norms related to the preventing war and conflict, guaranteeing human rights, protecting the environment, and ensuring social justice.

End the practice of targeting or assisting in the assassination of leaders of other sovereign states, and of engaging in "regime change".

End the practice of mollifying public opposition by couching aggressive acts in euphemistic "operations" such as "Operation Just Cause", "Operation Iraqi Freedom", "Operation Enduring Freedom",

End the destabilization of states and regions through the sale of arms, including through the guise of "foreign aid" or through infiltration of NGOs, such as USAID, NED, Freedom House or through fundamentalist Christians in groups such as Operation Rescue.

End the production of land mines and end the procrastination, by those responsible, to remove land mines from all areas of the world where land mines are known to exist.

End the reluctance of nuclear arms states to comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by failing to implement Article VI of the Treaty, (*Article VI : commits all parties to pursue negotiations in good faith on measures to end the nuclear arms race and to achieve disarmament* .).

End the production of all weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear, chemical, and biological, as agreed to in UNCHE in 1972, and in specific conventions.

Suffocate the production of uranium, end importing and exporting of uranium, prohibit the use of weapons such as those with depleted uranium and cluster and end the continued profit-making from the sale of arms and trade in small arms.

Disband NATO for its disregard of the international rule of law, including the objective of the Charter of the United Nations, and the Convention against Torture.

Prohibit propaganda for war (ICCPR), including establishing military bases, engaging in war games, producing and selling of armaments, and holding arms exhibitions.

End the unequal treatment of the states that possess nuclear weapons or nuclear weapon capabilities such as the destabilizing impact of the Middle East as a result of the possession of nuclear weapons by Israel.

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End the disregard for the obligations under the 1967 Outer Space Treaty to ensure that *exploration and use of outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and shall be the province of all mankind [humanity].*

Repeal the Patriot Act and Anti-Terrorism Act because they violate civil and political rights, and results in racial profiling.

End the practice of "rendering"- sending "persons of interests" to countries which are known to condone torture.

End the refusal to be judged by an international tribunal for any actions that might be deemed to violate international law related to crimes against the peace, to war crimes, or to genocide.

End the misuse of UN "peacekeeping" forces to clean up aggressive acts of destruction and occupation caused by other states.

Close and convert, to peaceful purposes, all foreign military bases in sovereign states around the world.

End the production, circulation and berthing of nuclear powered or nuclear arms-capable vessels throughout the world.

End "War Games" or "Military Exercises" such as Exercise Trident Fury or Northwest Training Range complex.

Discontinue the propping up and financing of military dictators and abandon the long standing policy enunciated against Somoza "he's a bastard but he is our bastard".

Demilitarize the economy by reallocating resources presently committed to military purposes to provide for the needs of citizens

to pass on the peace dividend to the developing countries as undertaken through numerous UN Conference Action Plans and UN General Assembly Resolutions and Declarations.

End misplaced spending priorities: on militarism, on adulterated unsafe food, on production of products and substances harmful to the environment and human health, and redirecting budgetary expenses to eradicate poverty.

2.00 CEASING EXPLOITATIVE TRADE

End the undermining, by International Trade agreements, such as GATT, and the subsequent WTO, of measures which would advance and promote socially equitable environmentally safe and sound renewable energy, transportation, agriculture, forestry etc.

Dismantle or abrogate trade institutions and agreements, such as WTO and NAFTA, which promulgate globalization, deregulation and privatization; these institutions and agreements undermine the rule of international public trust law, and condone and actively facilitate corporations benefiting and profiting from war and from environmental destruction.

End all proposals which will result, through the practice of harmonization of standards and regulations, in arriving at the lowest common denominator for health and environmental standards.

End the requirement of) “testing once” and (ii) “reliance on testing by the private sector”. That if the private sector has already tested the substance or product, Environmental agencies would have to justify before congress if they want to test again.

(i) “Testing once” to eliminate redundancy by testing once so that if a product is tested in one of the three countries it does not have to be tested in the other two. This practice would undermine the ability of states to carry out their own tests and ban substances such as the

banning by Canada of RBST or Bovine Growth Hormone in milk.

Abandon the IMF Structural Adjustment Program which has led to the violation of human rights, has exploited citizens in the developing world, which has resulted in years of privatization, and elimination of essential services throughout the world and has adversely impacted on vulnerable and indigenous peoples around the world.

4. STAVING OFF CORPORATISM AND

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

End the privatization, including Public Private Partnerships, of public services such as water, sewage and health care, and end the opposition to the affirmation that the access to water is a human right.

End corporate funding of education, including the corporate direction of research, and opposing end the opposition to the principle that research must be arms-length and not tied to corporations.

Enforce the international commitment made *to ensure that corporations, including*

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transnational corporations, comply with international law including international environmental law.

And oppose corporate "voluntary compliance",

End the subsidizing and investing, of public funds, in corporations that have developed weapons of mass destruction and "conventional arms" that have violated human rights that have denied social justice, that have exploited workers, and that have destroyed the environment.

Revoke charters of corporations, including transnational corporations, which have engaged in activities that impact on health and environment, including on the right to food, and right to water; end the legal fiction that the corporate form has constitutional rights as a person and prohibit corporate funding of political parties.

Phase out sunset industries-ones that are harmful to human health and the environment and institute a fair and just transition for workers and communities affected by the phase out.

End the bail-out of corporations and banks under the guise of their being "too big to fail", and

the reclassifying of corporations to take advantage of the bail –out

End the bail-out of corporations and banks under the guise of their being "too big to fail", and end the reclassifying of function, by financial institutions, such as Goldman Sachs in order to take advantage of the bail -out

Prohibit the centralization of banks and the egregious funny money banking systems and abandon the capitalist, exploitative, competitive economic model, and prohibit corporate funding of politicians,

End shifting, by corporations, of their addresses offshore to lower their taxes, and end the evading, by corporations, of criminal charges by spinning off their companies.

5. DENYING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Eliminate the widening gap between the developed and the developing countries and ensure steadily accelerating economic and social development and peace and justice for present and future generation... (Preamble, Declaration on the Establishment of a new international economic order, 1974)

Cancel Third World debt. And end the reluctance to implement the long-standing international commitment to transfer .7% of the GDP for overseas development aid (ODA) and, end the practice of send arms as ODA and end the extension of active assistance to developing countries tied, political or military conditions.

End all discrimination on the following grounds:

- race, tribe, or culture;
- colour, ethnicity, national ethnic or social origin, or language; nationality, place of birth, or nature of residence (refugee or immigrant, migrant worker);
- gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, or form of family, [including same-sex marriage]
- disability or age;
- religion or conviction, political or other opinion, or - class, economic position, or other status.

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End the violation of human rights including labour rights, civil and political rights, social and cultural rights- right to food, right to housing, right to water right to sewage treatment, right to a universally accessible, not-for-profit health care system, right to education and social justice.

End the denial of the labour right to strike, of the right to have collective bargaining, and requirement of equal pay for work of equal value

End the redefinition of Torture and thus the violating of the Convention against Torture through Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and end the practice of rendition of citizens and failure to abide by the Geneva Conventions.

End cruel and inhumane punishment such as capital punishment, which violates accepted international norms.

End the discrimination against immigrants, and refugees and against Migrant Workers and their Families; *and to revoke the Secure Fence Act and end the unconscionable wall between the United States and Mexico.*

Abandon the no-fly`` list, and no-cross boarder lists.

Oppose "SLAPP suits" against public participation.

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End the targeting, intimidating and discriminating against activists on the grounds of political and other opinion (a listed ground in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

End religious extremism and proselytizing including the spread of Evangelical Christianity around the world, which has undermined local indigenous cultures, instilled fear through the dangerous belief in the "rapture", "Armageddon" and "left behind", and condemn dispensationalist "end times" scenario which has serious irreversible consequences. And has led to the undermining of other established beliefs and practices

End the defiance of the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of civilians, and respect international human rights and humanitarian law.

End unilateralism and affirm a commitment to multilateralism and oppose unilateral actions that undermine global common security.

End current irreversible practices that will violate the rights of future generation intergenerational equity includes the rights of future generations to their cultural, natural heritage and to a safe environment.

6. CONTRAVENING INTERNATIONAL LAW

End the position of refusing to respect the jurisdiction of the international Court of Justice in

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terms of revenge through military intervention and to instead seek justice through the International Court of Justice.

End reluctance to do the following:

1 to ratify the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties

2 to ratify the international Convention for the Elimination of all Forms

of Discrimination Against Women and its protocol

3. to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity

4 to ratify the Kyoto Protocol

5 to ratify the Convention on the rights of migrant Workers and their families

6. to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child

7. to ratify the International Covenant of Social economic, and Cultural Rights

8. to ratify the Optional Protocols of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

9. to abide by the Convention Against Torture

10. to abide by the Geneva protocols on prohibited weapons

11. and to sign and ratify the Convention for the Banning of Landmines,

11 to sign and ratify all Geneva Protocols, including Protocol V, which requires the removal of remnants of war

12 to invoke the precautionary principle, which appears in the Rio Declaration, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, as a general and enforceable principle of law

Similarly, many NGOs were also reluctant to be “proscriptive”. For examples, NGOs proclaimed slogans such as “Go Green” without being willing to seriously advocate the banning, or phasing out of practices and substances which are counterproductive to `GO Green or are equally bad or worse than the current practices. With the GE crop producing states, the failure to be proscriptive was undoubtedly intentional but with the NGOs the failure to be proscriptive was most likely unintentional.

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End car dependency and the development of car dependent communities, and move towards provision of bicycle paths and socially equitable and environmentally sound public transportation and institute, a fair and just transition program for workers and communities

Phase out sunset industries-ones that are harmful to human health and the environment and institute a fair and just transition for workers and communities affected by the phase out.

□ End environmentally induced diseases, and the social determinant of health problems- such as poverty, and provide universal access to a publicly-funded not-for-profit health non-two tier health care system .

See further examples of proposed draft “proscriptions” in Annex.