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Welcome, Willkommen, Bienvenue, Bienvenidos, Benvenuto. Welcome to our current issue in which we discuss “Going Green and off the Grid,” the “ZeroHouse,” saving money when you go green and the Political Conservative Movement and its analysis by historian Thomas Frank.

GOING GREEN AND OFF THE GRID

In the near future, we are all going to move towards a green technology and it will start with your home and car. What does it mean to have a green home and an eco friendly lifestyle? For starters it should follow some basic construction rules:

- Have energy efficient and non toxic insulation through the home (attic, walls etc)
- Have a compact space-efficient floor plan (about 1,900 sq ft)
- Have a north-south orientation for summer shade, winter sun and prevailing breezes
- Have triple pane energy efficient windows with low E glazing
- Have a rainwater collection system for plants and recycling via processing home plant
- Have a metal roof with foam spray insulation or bright solar reflecting paint.
- Have a carport instead of a garage
- Have energy efficient appliances, air condition-heating and water heater.
- Use concrete foundation as flooring.
- Have only native or drought-tolerant plants in yard with underground drip irrigation.
- Use low flow plumbing and Energy Star features.
- Have solar generated energy with enough battery storage, sufficient to be off the grid.
- Have heating and air condition ducts inside the thermal envelope.(inside insulated parts)
- Reduce amount of grass; plant native shrubs and trees and flowers for wildlife habitat.

THE OFF THE GRID ZEROHOUSE

What is a Zerohouse? It is a house that generates as much energy as it uses over the course of a year and handles all or most of their own water wastewater uses. They are built with renewable materials and advanced energy and water conservation features. It features solar panels and energy efficient designs constructed with little or no environmental impact. It is

designed to operate without external connections to external sources of power or water. The house is shaded by solar panels and shot through with electronic sensors that can be controlled through a laptop. In summation, the Zerohouse:

- Generates its own electricity via solar panels that store it in a battery bank. Fully charged, the house can operate without sunlight for a week.
- The solar array supports all of the electronic needs and its excess can be sold back to a utility via a hybrid model.
- Conserves energy with closed cell structural foam insulating walls and roof to R58. There are zoned climate-controlled systems and LED lighting.
- Collects its own water via four 550 gallon cisterns. Low pressure plumbing fixtures are gravity fed, reducing need for power consuming pumps. Processes its own waste through a digester converting waste into clean, dry compost that is removed twice a year.
- It is completely automatic. All functions are monitored via sensors and can be controlled via a laptop computer from anywhere in the world.
- It is maintenance free. The exterior panels will not scratch; dent, mildew or fade and steel frame components are bonded to resist corrosion.

GREEN LIFESTYLE: SAVE GREEN WHEN YOU GO GREEN

Being informed about going green can save you thousands of dollars in the long run. By using solar or wind for energy and using energy efficient appliances, you can bring your utility bills to zero if you make the commitment. The United States is the most wasteful country; in energy consumption, Americans use more than double the amount per capita of the United Kingdom. The state of Texas uses as much energy as France, Japan and the United Kingdom combined. The autos that we have been driving have not changed much in a century and are still not very efficient. (about 45% efficient). Most of our appliances, air condition and heating units are wasting 40% to 50% in energy consumption. The same is true with water consumption, a commodity that will be scarce in the future. The following is data associated with the home, food and finances as it relates to going green:

Your Home: According to Maria Tikoff Vargas, spokesperson for *EPA Energy Star* program, the average home is responsible for twice the greenhouse gas emissions as the average car. On average, each household spends \$2,200 a year on energy bills. You can start by having an annual check up that includes air condition and heating unit, ducts, filters, thermostats, seals around windows, doors, attic, walls notwithstanding doubling your insulation. You can get tax credits for all of the above. Check energystar.gov/tax credits and for rebates dsireusa.org or energystar.gov. *Dry Cleaners:* A common solvent used in dry cleaning is Perchloroethylene or perc. The problem is that while it is cheap and widely used, the disadvantage is its heavy exposure linked to cancer. Other toxic solvents that are used are hydrocarbons which are petroleum based compounds which are potentially less toxic but contribute to greenhouse gases. Some dry cleaners are advertising green solvents such as liquid silicone but since these are not regulated or tested, one does not know the safety of these products. Perhaps, the safest is wet cleaning that uses water, detergents and computer technology to control agitation. If the detergents are safe, it is as effective as perc. This method requires special pressing machines to restore shape to garments. The federal government has barred perc in residential buildings by the year 2020 and California will ban machines using the solvent by 2023. Save your body from yet another harmful toxic substance.

Your Food : The way you eat has a large impact on the environment—from the process of raising animals to the shipping of food around the globe. *Plant a garden:* Save money by planting your own tomatoes and veggies. It is also promotes organic foods. If you do not have space, use pots on your porch, deck, balcony or roof. Plant fruit trees (apples, peach, apricots, figs, citrus etc). Watermelons and cantaloupes in sandy soil do well in summer. *Buy in bulk locally:* switch to dried foods that you can buy in bulk and have for longer periods. Several friends or families can approach a local farmer to get bulk foods. To find local farms in your area check eatwild.com or localharvest.org. *Compost:* Cut down on your garbage and collection bills—by starting a compost pile or bin. You can compost fruit and vegetable peels and rinds, eggshells, leaves and lawn clippings by adding water and some soil. When it turns to a rich, black soil, use it for your garden and save a trip to Home Depot or Lowes. For info check epa.gov.

Your Finances: How you conduct yourself and your finances has much to do with what our environment will look like in the future. *Go Paperless:* Electing to receive bill and other financial statements via E mail rather than snail mail cuts down on paper use can result in savings from many companies that give you credits or discounts. Save on ordering fees by reducing the number of checks you write. Use your debit card for purchases and pay online, instead. You can also ask retailers not to print out a receipt; you do not need to have a receipt from every store if you will already have one online. *Recycle, reuse and donate:* Recycling and reusing items is one of the easiest ways to go green and it costs less than buying new products. It also cuts down on waste and potential harmful dumping of toxic substances. Check FreeCycle.org if you want to post things you want to get rid of or if you want to sell furniture etc, try Craigslist.org.

Thomas Frank: Views on the Conservative Movement (Republicans, Democrats et. al.)

Historian Thomas Frank in recent years has examined the last decade as “A Low, Dishonest Decade.” He is the editor of *Baffler Magazine*, a contributing editor to *Harpers’s*; a weekly columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*; and the author of *One Market Under God*, the bestselling *What’s The Matter With Kansas?*, and his recent best seller, *The Wrecking Crew*. In his analysis, there are two areas that stand out: the political conservative movement of Washington and its pervasive media spokespersons whose hidden agenda is the weakening of government and the imposition of unregulated free market government. In his recent work, he describes conservatism as “an expression of American business.” While Republicans are the inventors and proponents, it also includes Democrats and Independents who buy into this corrupt power money philosophy. Its media proponents include papers like the *National Review* or radio and T.V. politically embroiled voices of Limbaugh, Beck, Hoenig, Hannity that support the party of Palin, Abramoff, Rove, DeLay, Kristol and O’Reilly. While this shift begins with Reagan in 1980, it was not long before Democrats followed with the deregulation frenzy under Jimmy Carter followed by Clinton’s pushing for NAFTA and signing the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which gave the megamedia companies all they wanted, notwithstanding, the S&L swindles in the late 1980’s. Clinton’s outsourcing set up the government-for-profit of the Bush era. His war on federal wages merely continued Reagan’s dislike of federal work force and it ensured that it would remain an unattractive career option. Money giveaways are nothing new to Washington: it is seen in the liberalism toward special interests groups, handouts to organized whiners or pork barrel projects like the TVA but according to Frank, these are nothing compared to type of money that is going to defense contractors, homeland security etc.

It is an era of privatization and outsourcing that added to the “culture of corruption.” Frank speaks of the culture of corruption not generically-to mystify or accuse but one whose problem is systemic and structural. It is the logical consequence of the power money business philosophy that is in place. It is not about individuals except for a few that invented it. It is about interests that manipulate the prosperity produced by all only to benefit the riches of the few. In the past, the Vanderbilts had their own Senator to bring them more; now, it is more ideological and political deception. The theoretical justification is that the market is always right and in every case better than government bureaucracy. They think of themselves as crusaders against corruption, demanding at the same time, deregulation or privatization. Their mantra is that Government should get out of the marketplace altogether. But who then regulates insider trading and price fixing? There are a few statements by Frank that reflect on the conservative movement: “Bad government is the natural product of rule by those who believe government is bad,” Cynicism spawns corruption, which spawns cynicism,” Bring back the regulators before the system self-destructs.” There does not seem to be a clear line between Republicans, or Democrats and the Conservatives. The distinction is constantly abused by conservatives in order to get their movement off the hook; the inverse is true with Republicans or Democrats. According to Frank, there is a political entrepreneurship that inverts corruption and violence into a glamorous and romantic image; case in point is the secret Reagan war against the Sandanistas all the while trading arms for hostages to finance it. The new mantras were “freedom fighters”, the contras in Nicaragua, the mujaheddin in Afghanistan, Jonas Savimbi in Angola; it was a kind of sixties in reverse. They supported these corrupt regimes with entrepreneurial methods; asking millionaires to contribute to conservative non-profits which would then buy supplies for the contras, including the fundraiser. This would transform their control of the state into cash (selling weapons to Iran). The ultimate ambition was to create a foreign policy instrument free of the scrutiny of Congress. This entrepreneurship is officially woven into the fabric of the state now. The results are the incompetence of FEMA and Blackwater. According to Frank, democracy is over, it is rule by money. It is a plutocracy of the pre-thirties system. In an interview, Frank heard a tea party leader say he was against monopoly and that we needed to get back to free markets without any understanding that it was the conservative movement that created the money power base for a Market Plutocracy. Frank also reminds his audience that the American people have very short memories; the Decade of Conservative failure included converting a budget surplus to a deficit, creating a fraudulent war borrowing money to fight it, violations of the Constitution, scandals over earmarking, scandals over Iraq reconstruction and the economic disaster of Wall Street. Conservatives are quick to talk about government failure but when they are in power, they also deliver government failure. Frank believes that it is not so much from incompetence but from ideology and design. When conservatives are in power, the Department of Labor is routinely stuffed with ideological cranks and people who do not believe in the mission. The result is that they do not enforce anything. Another device is to de-fund it. In the 50’s and 60’s and up to 1970, federal workers were paid a comparable amount as the private sector. Reagan opened up a large pay gap and the consequence was an inferior government. One surprising fact discovered by Frank originates from a quote of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that supports the idea that you want second or third-rate people in government (“The best public servant is the worst one”). More surprising is that he finds this idea repeated over and over again throughout the long history of the conservative movement. They believe the market is the universal principle of human

civilization and that government is a hindrance to unfettered capitalism and unregulated markets. Frank is not talking about the conservative grassroots voters of Kansas but the conservative movement in Washington that deceives the uninformed or manipulates grassroots people. It begins with the whole constellation of think tanks and lobby shops and not-for-profits, the newspapers and fundraisers. It is an industry that churns out a product that knows how to twist the facts and make them seem as dissidents in favor of populists ideas. To conservatives, taxation is almost a form of theft but when they reduce taxes, it overwhelmingly favors big business and the wealthy. Frank contends that America is unique among the nations in that our political system, half of our political system is basically dedicated to the destruction of the government from within. There is no other country that is like this. But there are countries where government works well; even India did not suffer any financial repercussion and that is because they were regulating not stopping enforcement or de-regulating. We are at an age of experts in twisting language and even brainwashing. Key words become mantras like “freedom” and its loss, or “national” as a negative against “freedom.” Democrats never defend the state, at least not the prominent leading Democrats. Why? Because as Frank states: “Because I think that would get them in trouble with their funders. I mean, the power of money is huge in the political system. You know, despite all the efforts that have been made over the years to get money out of politics. It’s still immensely powerful.” And when asked about the real casualties of *The Wrecking Crew*, Frank concluded that “It’s ordinary working people. Thirty or forty years ago, it was possible to work a blue-collar job and enjoy a middle-class standard of living. In fact, it was common. It was the American way. The reason it was so common, though, was because we decided to make it that way and used government as our instrument. That instrument is no longer under our control; It is structural, an industry that is not going down without an enormous fight...it is a very profitable game and a lot of Democrats seem excited to try their hand at it...there are some Democrats and Republicans that are trying to get to the bottom of this...but the literature of Washington is the literature of cynicism and disillusionment...I wanted to update it for our time. But (for me) I prefer the word “skeptical,” since I believe good government is possible.”

DID YOU KNOW..?

- Regarding the elderly, early colonial families’ reverence for the old began to decline after 1750. After the Revolution, they became the target for abuse and as a consequence created a whole new vocabulary of scorn e.g. “old goat”, “geezer”, “old cornstalk”, “baldy”. The positive words that had been used before (“progenitor”, “eldern”, “grandame”, “forefather”, “granfer”) began to disappear.
- While it is believed that America loves immigrants, the fact is that it is directed to a special class: those that have been here first. When Irish Catholics later came in the nineteenth century Protestants rioted in protest burning over 30 homes and killing some fourteenth Irish Catholics. The same racist attitudes were directed to other groups arriving from Eastern Europe.

Happy and Insightful Reading,

Arnoldo Carlos Vento