



by Howard Keep

A Modern Day Moses

“The survival of our natural environment in its present form, and the existing type of human society within it, is not assured. One of the main direct causes of this environmental and cultural risk, or unsustainability, is the pattern and scale of the worldwide industrial economy. As **the industrial economy approaches the same physical scale as the biosphere**, a new organising pattern for industry is urgently becoming needed, one in which a new form of physical organisation will be matched and supported by a new organising template for business activity.”

These are the words of Hardin Tibbs, an experienced scenario planner who has made significant contributions on issues involving technology and the environment, and someone who is at the forefront of the emerging field of industrial ecology, which is a new approach to industrial sustainability. Hardin visited South Africa recently, and I was one of the fortunate members of the spellbound audience at the FNB Conference and Learning Centre in Sandton on May 14th 2007, to hear a talk titled “New Global Dynamics and Future Prospects”. The presentation was co-sponsored by Econometrix, the Centre for Innovative Leadership and Noah Financial Services. I found Hardin's talk riveting, with its mixture of alarm and hope all rolled up in one stimulating food for thought hour and a half. As opposed to Al Gore's “An Inconvenient Truth”, Hardin Tibbs' presentation was more cerebral and less emotive, and definitely less Barnum and Bailey. But then, I doubt whether Hardin Tibbs hankers after the Oval Office.

future imperfect

To fully cover and appreciate Hardin's wide ranging observations would require hundreds, if not thousands, of pages, so I will restrain myself from going into the details, and rather give a distillation of what he said and an overview of my reflections emanating from his perspicuous examination of facts and history, with a promise to revisit his passion in future articles. The key to what he is saying is the warning that **“the industrial economy is approaching the same physical scale as the biosphere”**. To put it mildly, humankind has been on a maniacal Gaia bashing crusade over the past couple of centuries, and it has been exponentially escalating. Sigmund Freud would be having a whale of a time explaining this, weaving it into his Oedipal and Electra complexes. To put it more bluntly, we are moving from wiping out other species to wiping out ourselves, by making our environment uninhabitable. However, we do have the ability to move back from the precipice, and the first step is to recognise where we're at. This ability to change tack is defined by Hardin Tibbs as an evolutionary step in think-

ing, with the ultimate goal being a technology revolution. A sort of post modern world view and a revisionist authentication of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in a flatter version, as both physiological needs and self-actualisation have both emerged at the top of the pyramid. We can even evoke Thomas Malthus in this discussion, as mankind attempts to turn his theories on its head, as it moves from conventional thinking to responsible thinking. As Hardin puts it, “Balanced rather than negative reciprocity”, i.e. mankind and particularly business participating in an ethical expansion, and keeping nature in balance. Why, even

hard nosed business gurus such as Michael Porter are acknowledging this reality.

Hardin Tibbs is optimistic that this will happen, and he cites his reading of history, and his belief that we are at the tipping point of eras. He refers to this as an evolution of thinking and cultures. The traditional era reached its peak in the late 1700's/early 1800's, with the industrial revolution being the catalyst for the

next era, which was the modernity culture, focused on material goods and the me generation. This modernity culture reached its peak in the 1950's and has been on the wane since then. The exciting news is that Hardin believes that we are at the tipping point of cultures, and that this tipping point, according to quite a few studies, could happen as early as 2008. The new era he defines as the era of “Cultural Creatives”. Cultural Creatives were recognised in 2000 by sociologist Paul H. Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson in their book “The Cultural Creatives - How 50 Million People Are Changing the World”. In this book they identify a powerful group of New Progressives who are disenchanted with materialism and hedonism, and who will eventually find their identity and change the world. 2008 seems to be the magical year when they will reach critical mass in the USA, and will join forces with like-minded people across the globe, and move us to a new paradigm. Maybe Al Gore, despite his righteous protestations, will find himself in the White House in 2009. Maybe he will, with a little help from his friends, save the world!



Hardin Tibbs
– Scenario Planner



Al Gore
– Presidential Planner