

Lester Brown in Stockholm 8 May 2010

Transcript

There is no question that we need a fundamental change in life styles. And we've been educated by television commercials, that tell us that the more we consume the happier we'll be. In fact in the US incomes have tripled since 1960, but happiness has not gone up at all, it may have gone down a bit.

The other thing to keep in mind, Daniel, is that in a sense... I mean your group is really working hard on this now, but in a sense many of us have been talking about this, and doing some of the changes in our life styles for forty years now and we are still losing the game. So beyond life style changes – when people often ask me the question: "What can I do?" and they expect me to say "Recycle your newspapers and change your light bulbs", and so forth (and those things are important), but we are now at a point where we have to change the system, and we have to do it quickly. And that means becoming politically active.

Politically active, and pushing for a carbon tax for example. If I were to pick one thing to do it would be restructuring the tax system. And I would always use the term restructuring so that they can't isolate it and say "Oh you want to tax everyone more!" We do not want to tax anyone more we just want to change the structure of the tax system so we tax labor less and carbon more.

And so – I am not saying "Give up on life styles" it's important, and it's a way of getting people to engage the issues and to think seriously about them, but I think we also have to become politically active. And I could talk about... in the US a group numbered in the thousands organizing across the country – not millions, thousands – many of them young people, have brought the construction of new coal-fired power plants to a halt in the US. We may never license another coal-fired power plant in the US. That phase, the last three years, is now complete.

The second phase, which is closing existing plants, is now under way, and just before I left Washington I was making a list: there are at least 30 maybe now close to 40 coal-fired power plants scheduled to close in the next few years. And I mention that because it has happened so fast, it is so important and the number of people involved is not millions, it is thousands. A little handful of people in a country of 300 millions has changed... I mean there is a growing dissatisfaction with coal and they tapped into that in an organized way, and it has had a profound result.