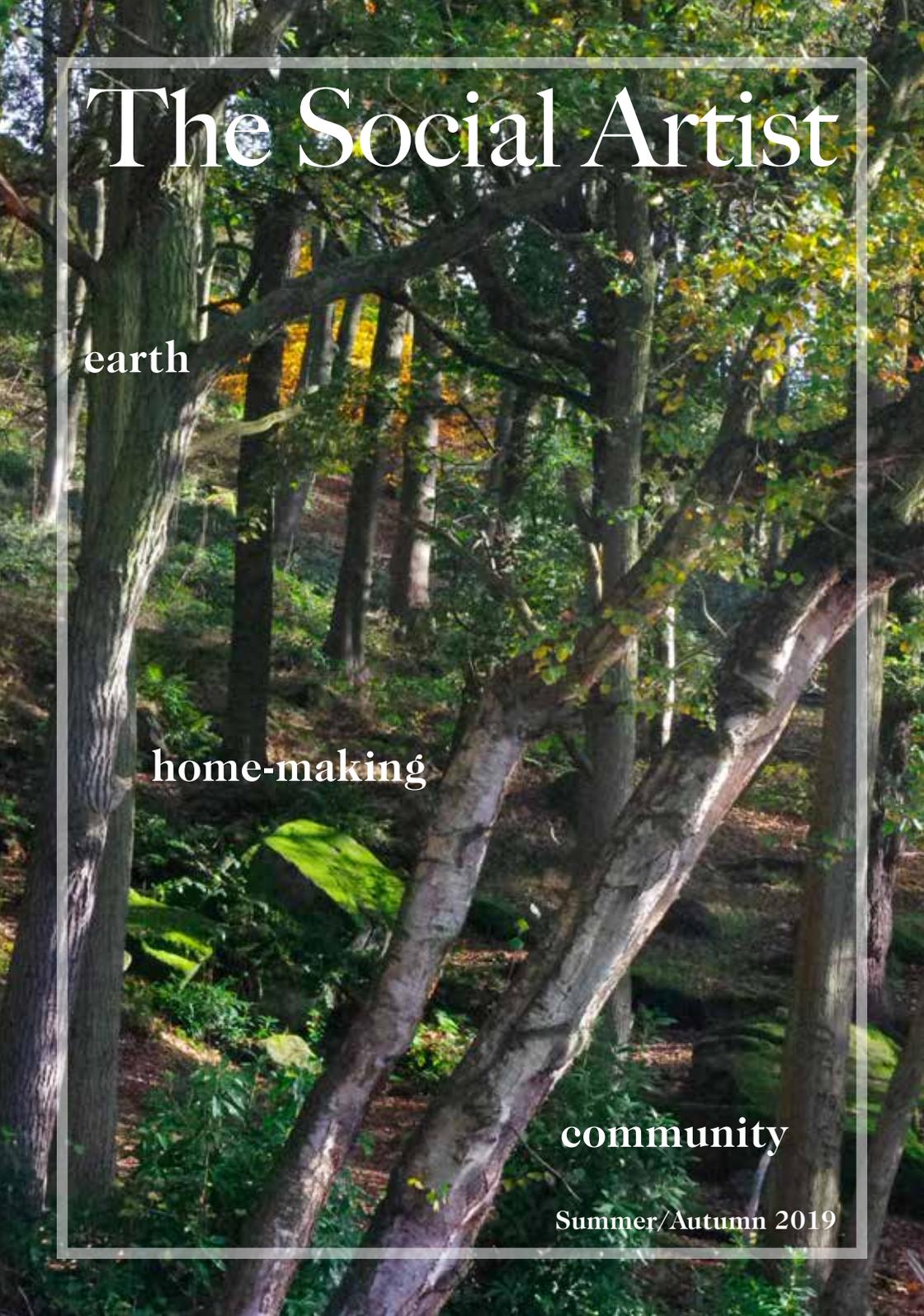


The Social Artist



earth

home-making

community

Summer/Autumn 2019

The SOCIAL ARTIST

(incorporating The SOCIAL CREDITER)

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Editorial

Social Credit is a body of economic thought that provides answers to two questions: (a) Why does money dominate the political economy so that family concerns and ecological issues must play second fiddle? (b) What practical steps can be taken to turn finance from slave driver to useful tool?

The Social Artist was originally founded as *The Social Creditor* in 1938. Since 2001 our tiny team of volunteers has reviewed books and reported developments in economics, politics, religion, philosophy, ecological issues, women's issues, child care, health, household, peace, social justice and so on ad infinitum, citing university tomes and protest newsletters. Material from our publications has been reprinted in publications across the world. Back issues of *The Social Artist* are available on the website www.dougllassocialcredit.com. They contain excellent reviews of excellent material produced over the last decade or so, all highly relevant to solving the current, ongoing social and ecological crises. The present issue of *The Social Artist* is an extended edition, since we missed out the Summer issue.

This double edition relates to the key issue of modern time: the need to re-sacralise childhood. It is a clarion call to blend lateral thinking on domestic and government childcare policies with

informed action in all three spheres of the social order - the political, cultural and economic. The kind of household environmental impact assessment advocated by Helga Moss has moved from being a "wouldn't it be nice if we could do it" to an urgent necessity for all households, most particularly those welcoming children into this world.

Childhood is common to the whole of humanity. Like sleep, it is a universal condition essential for the individual's future life as an adult human being. It follows, therefore, that the right to sound child care is a fundamental human right. Presently, in the world of advanced industrialisation childhood is, for too many, a nightmare. *The British Betrayal of Childhood*, recently published and reviewed in this edition of TSA/C, carries a whole chapter, 60 pages, of facts and figures under the title "What's it like to be young in the UK today?". In and amongst the facts are many instances of excellent work being done by individuals, charities and statutory bodies. But for those of us seeking radical change in the immediate future, it is time to dust off our copies of Robert Hart's *Beyond the Forest Garden*.

Published by Gaia Books in 1996, *Beyond Forest Gardening* is a comprehensive and thoroughly readable text which neatly sums up the current

social, political, economic and ecological crises we face today. Aptly titled, the book takes us back to the original Forest Academy in the groves of ancient Greece, and on into the future. Whilst I was preparing the production of this delayed issue of *The Social Artist* my eye fell upon the following passage:

“The dawning of the Renaissance led to dramatic changes. Since then, knowledge has continued to expand, causing the series of dramatic yang-events and yang-developments which have shaken Europe, America and the rest of the world ever since. A vast expansion of knowledge has been accompanied by colossal accumulations of wealth and power. These yang forces have combined to lead to degrees of destructiveness and environmental pollution which could lead to the extermination of all life on Earth.

“After the horror of the bombing of Hiroshima, Einstein sent a telegram to members of the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists, of which he was President. It read: “Our world faces a crisis as yet unperceived by those possessing the power to make great decisions The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our ways of thinking, and thus we drift to an unparalleled catastrophe. A new way of thinking is essential if man is to survive and move toward higher levels.” This ‘new way of thinking’ can be summed up in one word: caring. If only people cared about the fate of their neighbours. And in the modern world, caring about your neighbour means caring about yourself.” p32-3.

The idea of caring about your neighbour and yourself put me in mind of Jay Griffith’s explorations of childhood in *Kith: The Riddle of the Childscape*, (which we reviewed in the

Winter 2013 issue of *The Social Artist*). In a fascinating talk given to the Centre for Human Ecology (see <https://vimeo.com/68430907>) she refers to the story that Einstein, confronted by a mother seeking advice on how to raise her small son to become a successful scientist. What should she read to him? asked the mother:

“Fairy Tales,” Einstein responded without hesitation.

“Fine, but what else should I read to him after that?” the mother asked.

“Even more fairy tales,” replied the great scientist.

Produced six years ago by the Centre for Human Ecology, this talk is a sound and moving plea for a sane approach to child care policy backed by healthy community provision for all aspects of childhood.

Perhaps the best known scientist of the post-Second World War era is Rachel Carson. Her first books, written in the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima, were followed by publication of a remarkable article published in a popular American magazine *Women’s Home Companion* (see page 47). Somewhat incongruously surrounded by adverts for baby products, “Help Your Child to Wonder” is a timeless piece of writing that can be appreciated by every one of us as members of local communities on this planet.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead, quoted by Sir Al Aynsley-Green in *The Betrayal of British Childhood*.

The Wendell Berry Solution

Childrearing is one of the most important ways of working for the future, political or otherwise.

Elaine Morgan, author of *The Descent of Woman*.

Thirty years ago poet and farmer Wendell Berry asked the vital question - What Are People FOR? He warned that the wholesale migration from the farms and into the cities boded ill for the land and its people. Since then, mothers have produced a whole generation of urban children who have had no option but to serve the money economy or join the queues at the benefit offices or food banks. Official policy, promoted by government departments, corporations and universities has forced millions of rural people to stream into the towns, on the grounds that they are *financially superfluous* in the countryside.

As farmers and their families have been driven off the land because they are financially 'uneconomic', they have been replaced by agribusiness, with its high-tech machinery, petrochemicals, energy consumption, credit, advertising and computers. The effect on the land has been destruction of fertility, loss of top soils on an unprecedented scale, devastation of nature and wildlife, species loss, and waste and pollution everywhere.

The effect on people of the ill-considered wholesale migration from the land is disastrous. The destruction of rural communities has driven individual

families into urban isolation. Loss of contact with the soils, the seasons and the entire world of nature has resulted in escalating levels of disaffection, insecurity, skill-loss, welfare dependency and dis-ease. In farming families cooking, cleaning, healing, weaving and wood-working skills can be learned with ease, alongside caring for plants and animals. In urban conglomerations the loss of home-making skills in general, and child care skills in particular, has proved little short of catastrophic for so many young lives.

And the great question remains - what *are* people for? In the rush to mechanisation, automation and computerisation, people are servicing the machines and new technologies that are devastating the earth and playing havoc with humanity itself.

"In the country, meanwhile, there is work to be done. This is the inescapable, necessary work of restoring and caring for our farms, forests, and rural towns and communities - work that we have not been able to pay people to do for forty years and that, thanks to our forty-year 'solution to the farm problem', few people any longer know how to do."

So wrote Wendell Berry thirty years ago in his book of essays under the title *What Are People FOR?* Over the last three decades government departments, the universities and the corporate world have continued to assert that the sole purpose of people is to serve the *financial*

economy. The Wendell Berry solution is that all people are called to cultivate the art cannot be done by individuals acting alone. The starting point that suggests itself is the group study reading of two essays by Wendell Berry; “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer” and “Feminism, the Body and the Machine”. Fortunately, these are available through bookshops in the UK, in the *Penguin Modern Series*, at a cost of £1. There could not be a better way to spend £1 if it results in debate leading to practical action.

Wendell Berry is a former professor of English at the University of Kentucky and the author of thirty-two books of essays, poetry and novels. He has worked a farm in Henry County, Kentucky since 1965. He has been a fellow of both the Guggenheim Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. He has received numerous awards for his work, including an award from the National Institute and Academy of Arts and Letters in 1971, and most recently, the T.S. Eliot Award.

Consumption and Fertility

Helga Moss¹

Consumption and fertility are not commonly linked in Western feminist discourse. Maria Mies’ books are an important exception. She has pointed out clear North-South differences, wherein women of the North are encouraged to breed and buy, while women of the South should not breed, but sell their labour power cheaply within the context of the world market — becoming ‘integrated into development’² Consumption and fertility, however, have become politically linked in the course of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) negotiations. Countering the North’s preoccupation with population growth in the South, many Southern voices — and some Northern ones too — have rightly pointed to the non-sustainability of the Western development

model that creates poverty at one end and wealth at the other. In this chapter, I shall try to map some conditions for the North to change its ways.

Solidarity from diversity

Northerners experience a complex and fragmented reality, together with an enormous excess of information. We find it difficult to produce theoretical analyses that can act as concrete guidelines for individuals, groups and organizations. Our theories, often all too abstract, aim to explain complex relations which seem far removed from the everyday life where we actually act. Moving too quickly to a generalized level of picturing reality has the effect of silencing other perspectives and other realities. The feminists of the North have been doing this too much.

Accordingly, I must point out that my thoughts, reflections and knowledge are those of a white, urban, intellectual Norwegian mother in her thirties. It is quite impossible for me to reflect — fully or significantly the diverse realities of all women living in the North. These are women of different class and ethnic backgrounds, different occupations, young and old.

Creating an analysis for action in the area of consumption, therefore, must be a collective effort among and between diverse groups of women. It will have to be an ongoing process of sharing and critique. I believe that the most important challenge facing Western women today is how to act in order to reduce Western consumption, yet secure the well-being of all in our societies.

Consumption patterns

Norway's Minister of Development Cooperation, Grete Faremo, has stated that, in both the areas of over-consumption and over-population, the most dangerous thing is 'inaction'. This is questionable. It is possible to argue that the most dangerous thing now is action based on an analysis showing that population growth causes poverty and constitutes a major threat to the environment.

Inspired by DAWN and other feminist approaches³ in addressing the consumption patterns of the North, I will try to move from the level of everyday life. In a Southern context, this analytical starting point leads to an understanding of how decisions made in the inner chambers of the World Bank have a

profound and adverse impact on women in their everyday life as well as on their environment.

But if I start with the one kilo of paper that landed on my doorstep over the last ten days, where will it lead me? These advertisements for hundreds of commodities, distributed to every household in Oslo, where I live, most people usually throw away.

I do not grow any food, or weave or sew clothes; I have not built my house or made the furniture in it. Everything I use has been made by other people. It is like a global household. But of course, normally you do not reflect on that. If you have the money, you buy things in stores. When they are no longer useful, they become waste and will be disposed of by a public service. If I look around my flat I see hundreds of items whose history I know nothing about; in this respect, I am a 'normal' Western urban individual.

Buying and knowing

I have to buy all the things I need, sometimes ten items a day; and usually I am in a hurry to get home to my children. Each item has a price tag and a label describing the contents, and sometimes a label saying 'environmentally friendly product', words which cannot be trusted, as 'green' capitalists try to make money out of our environmental concerns. Every commodity I buy involves a choice. There are many things to be considered. The price factor often wins, and, if it is food, whether it is produced in Norway. I avoid the products singled out by campaigns; otherwise, my choices are not very informed. I feel guilty about

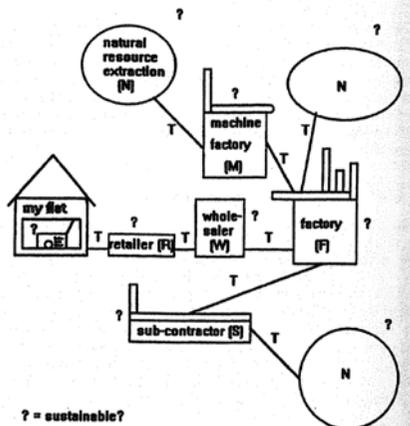
this. I should do more, know more. I buy so many things! And I am always in a hurry. The task of becoming a conscious, informed consumer seems so vast. And I suspect that there would be reasons to boycott most of the items I buy, were they critically scrutinized for their social and environmental costs.

Investigating a radio

I have tried to make a model of my consumption practices, to clarify to myself what I need to know in order to make really informed choices in compliance with the demands of

Figure 1

ONE COMMODITY, FROM CRADLE TO ME:



'sustainability'. My point of departure is that I need to know the history of the commodity from its beginnings to the point at which it reaches me. (In this investigation, I have disregarded the problems of waste.) Let us say that I want to buy a radio. What would I need to know in order to evaluate the sustainability of this purchase? Figure 1 shows in a very simplified manner the different categories of steps the radio-

in-the-making takes as it moves from raw material to my house as a complete radio apparatus. These steps include the retailer (R), the wholesaler (W), the factory (F) that produced the radio, the sub-contractors (S) who contributed the accessories, the machine factories (M) that contributed to F and S (and M), and, finally, the extraction of the raw materials necessary (N) to supply the factory and an unknown number of S's and M's. All these steps would have to be investigated for the radio's impact on sustainability. The evaluation of sustainability includes both the environmental impact assessment of the various production processes, and assessment of the intermediate transport arrangements (T).

There should also be an evaluation of the human aspect of its production (Figure 2), because we are also interested in the social sustainability of commodities. We must then take into account the workers: first, their working conditions, possible health hazards, and so on; secondly, their part in a web of consumption and production relations.

In order to arrive at an environmental and social impact assessment of this particular radio in terms of concrete reality, we have to combine both models (Figures 1 & 2) in order to arrive at a realistic model of investigation.

Already, the model is becoming too complex; the realistic model is not very clear. I have, however, learned several things:

(1) An understanding of my profound ignorance regarding my/our relationship

to nature in any concrete sense. I am — to use Maria Mica's expression — delinked from nature and people as producers of the things I use to live.

(2) A vivid impression of my fundamental dependence on a very complex structure, a web of seemingly infinite concrete relations to the varying ecosystems and working people of the world. This is a hard blow to the liberal theses of the independent actor on the market, the 'self-made man'. The fact is that within the market economy, the people and ecosystems that contribute to the making of my radio are invisible.

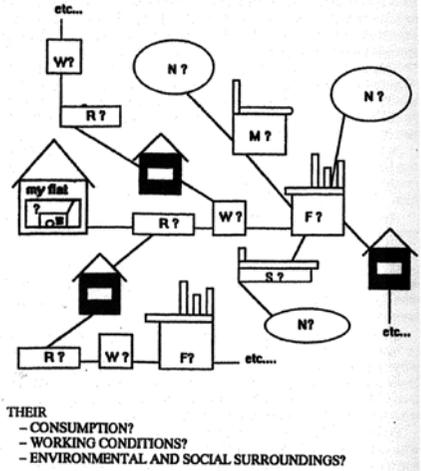
(3) I am caught in a serious ethical dilemma. If I want to live in harmony with nature, its plants and living beings, including women and children, and men, all over the planet, I and my children would have to starve, freeze and become outcasts in our own society and community. My subsistence work — my household — is totally dependent upon consuming from this global household even if I reduce our consumption to the things most essential for survival. This is the final blow to the liberal thesis of free choice. As a consumer, I am forced to violate the very value system that I try to teach my children: care, sharing, solidarity and responsible action.

(4) The liberal split between politics and economics does not apply. Considering the possible, indeed probable, link between my consumption-based life-sustaining work at home and the life-destroying production at the other side of the market place opens my eyes to the fact that buying is a political act.⁴ It

is an act in which my money carries the power and my moral judgement has to be suspended.

Figure 2

ONE COMMODITY, MORE CONCRETELY:



A divided household

In looking at this global household, one can discern the North-South division, which is also a class, race and gender division. Increasingly, peoples of the Third World, particularly women, have become the industrial workers of the world. They contribute to my household with their labour power and their natural resources; and to such an extent that their environment is being destroyed (through such activities as cash cropping, for example). For these efforts, however, they receive precious little in return. The goods a woman in the South produces for the world market I can buy very cheaply, which in turn increases the quantity of items I am able to buy. Living in the North, I can buy cheaply because the Southern woman is paid very little for her work; her wage is so small that it

cannot sustain her or her children. Hence, her children have to work in order to contribute to the family income. More children, then, means increased chances of survival.

But in view of the fact that under-consumption in the South is directly linked to overconsumption by the North, who are we to say that there are too many people in the South?

The population rhetoric

The rhetoric of the population discourse is so dangerously seductive because thinking in numbers closes our eyes to these links and divisions in the global household, including the power relations embedded in it.

At her opening statement at UNCED, the Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, stated that ‘we must reconcile human activities and human numbers with the laws of nature’. The problem with this reasoning is that it tends to reduce reality to the question of numbers. Numbers are easy to deal with: we can add, subtract, multiply and divide. Numbers speak simple truths and provide us with simple answers that cannot be questioned.

For instance, it is often claimed that it is the high and increasing number of people which creates environmental destruction in Bangladesh. But there are countries in Europe, such as Belgium, with a higher population density than Bangladesh. In Belgium, we find no World Bank conditionalities on reducing population. Belgium’s ecosystem, however, could hardly sustain such a heavy density of

people were it not for their integration into the world market. The fact that we — as part of this global household, are affecting the ecosystems of Bangladesh and all other nations integrated in the world market, is not considered. In this demographic, ‘population explosion’ line of thinking, it will always be the poor who are too many, no matter (or because of) how little they consume.

As long as we live and subsist within this global household, there is no way of justly assessing the balance of national environmental carrying capacity against the number of people within the nation. It is not the number of people that is significant, rather it is how different people relate to the ecosystems. To put it rhetorically: what is the earth’s carrying capacity for agro-businesses, for world market, profit-oriented industrialists, for the military, or presidents? How can ‘the number and activities’ of these people be ‘reconciled with the laws of nature’?

Fertility in the North

‘Why do you women in the North have so few children?’ asked medical doctor Jurema Werneck when she met Norwegian women at a conference in Oslo in 1991. Jurema works in the *favelas* (slums) of Rio, and is campaigning against the excessive number of sterilizations of black Brazilian women.

Many of the answers from the women included the words I used when speaking of myself as a consumer: choice, lack of time, energy and money. Many women say, if:

- I received more help from the father;

- I had my family (mother) close by;
- there were nurseries;
- our rent was not so high;
- we could afford to live on one wage only;
- the local environment was not so unfriendly;
- my job was less absorbing;
- I did not feel so exhausted after my first. ...

then I would have had more children.⁵

In societies where people are less dependent upon the market economy and the global household, they depend upon social networks of kinship and friendship to manage material survival; they have an 'extended' household. Or rather, we should say that our household 'shrinks' when integrated into the global one. These social networks are built through exchange on a person-to-person basis, which means that they also provide emotional bonds between people. They are a source of mutual support, fun, exchange of knowledge, as well as goods (gifts) and services.⁶

If you are totally dependent upon the market economy working long hours, buying all the things you need — you have neither the motivation nor the surplus energy to put into extensive social networking at a community level. Bonding between people demands frequent interpersonal interaction in a variety of different situations. **Lack of social bonding, with all it entails, is a major problem in the North, because our communities are torn apart by the way production and reproduction are organized. Thus, women's reproductive**

choices are made within a framework of social poverty.

For example, in Norway it is quite normal for a woman who has had her first-born to be left alone, most of the day, for months. When the baby cries night and day, she does not know why, and there is nobody to ask.

Even if her mother is there, her advice is not trusted, because professional child-rearing theories have taken away her authority. We are taught that a child's mother means everything to its well-being, and whatever goes wrong eventually, as mothers we blame ourselves. Motherhood is loneliness. Adding to the problems of merely being a mother are the frustrating gender relations. Divorce rates are high (especially since the mid-1970s), and it is usually the woman who leaves the man. She feels lack of support, or experiences outright physical abuse.

Women in the North are, of course, linked to the economy not only as consumers, but also as producers. Correlating to the statistics of decreasing fertility and increasing divorce rate, is the number of mothers with one or two children entering (or staying within) the labour market, increasingly on a full-time basis. Many women in this category develop some sort of health problems sooner or later.

Conclusion

I have painted this rather gloomy picture of social poverty and suffering in the North because it is important to counter the image being constructed in

international discourse of all problems being in the South, whereas the solutions are in the North. It should not be forgotten, however, that many traits of the consumption-based livelihood I have described here would also apply to middle- and upper-class segments of Southern societies.

Many people, mostly women, organize in many ways, in their local community as well as at a national level. There is a strong and growing understanding that current development with its emphasis on economic growth is tearing apart the very foundations of our societies, the way we live our everyday lives and develop as human beings. People who in various ways sustain life: women, workers, farmers, indigenous and fisher people and many others, subscribe to values in the reproductive/household sphere which assume that the economy should be adapted to sustain people. On the

other side, there are those who claim that people must adapt to promote the modern market economy.⁷ These latter are predominantly men; the urban, powerful, rich, who speak as if they have the solution to all problems; although, deep down, I am sure they know otherwise.

My own conclusion after this futile search for my relationship to nature is that:

We must search for ways not only to reduce our consumption, but to reduce our dependence as an exploitative and energy-consuming global household. In the attempt to achieve these changes, the women's movement has the opportunity to restructure our societies according to its own values. Our children do not need all these commodities. As Freud noted: 'The reason why money never makes the adult satisfied is that the child never desired money.'

¹ Based on a paper presented to the Planets Femea '92 Global Form, UNCED, Rio de Janeiro, 6 June 1992.

² Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1986.

³ For instance, Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1987.

⁴ In fact, the Norwegian language does not distinguish between the two; both words ('buy' and 'act') are translated as 'handle'.

⁵ Cf. Tone Schau Wetlestm, *Fertility Choices and Constraints: A Qualitative Study of Norwegian Families*, Solum Forlag, Oslo, 1991.

⁶ Although blind to the gender aspect of exchange, Marcel Mauss has opened our eyes to a different conception of economy, describing 'traditional' exchange systems as sources, or vehicles, of communality and spirituality. (Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Routledge, London, 1990) What kind of communality and spirituality is fostered by the world market system of exchange? Rather than meeting us as a Stranger on the market, the Other is erased and sometimes expelled.

⁷ The underlying assumption is that money, or capital, is the true creator and sustainer of life. As I have shown in my example, this corresponds to ordinary people's dependence on market consumption. Hence the system is not challenged.

COMMENT

on Helga Moss Article

Frances Hutchinson

“Where is the book in which the teacher can read about what teaching is? The children themselves are this book. We should not learn to teach out of any book other than the one lying open before us and consisting of the children themselves.”

— Rudolf Steiner, *Human Values in Education* (As cited in Robert Trostli (ed.), (1998) *Rhythms of Learning: Selected Lectures by Rudolf Steiner* p.44)

“The fate of the world’s children, the fate of the Earth and the future of the human family are, of course, inextricably linked.” So wrote the celebrated ecological economist Hazel Henderson as the ‘Earth Ethic’ awareness of the devastation being caused by the industrial economy was beginning to emerge.¹

Yet still, a quarter of a century later ‘economically sound’, but ecologically thoroughly unsound, policies continue to be endorsed by the politicians, welcomed by the press and media and taught uncritically in academia. Extinction Protestors highlight mounting evidence of the urgent need to tread sustainably on the earth by creating a sane social order. But nothing changes because the will to move out of our comfort zones has been lacking. It has been business-as-usual in the corridors of power, giving rise to wars and ecological devastation on an

unprecedented and unsustainable scale.

Helga Moss’s paper provides much food for thought. As workers and consumers we are all so busy meeting the demands of the industrialised, capitalist market system that we cannot see the wood for the trees. As we go about our daily business we note with concern the mounting ecological degradation and social injustices, but we cannot see that we are the cause of the trouble. We may try to moderate our choices as ethical consumers and good parents. But the sheer volume of items we consume in order to run our households continues to wreck the planet. In the meantime earning the money wage or salary prevents us from prioritising the care of every child born into our family and local community.

The materialist market economy, although based upon the illusion of freedom of choice, presents the individual householder with very little informed choice at all. Looking around the average Western household such as that in which you live at the moment, you will find hundreds of items the origins of which are totally unknown to you. Until relatively recent times this was not the case and, it can be argued, does

not need to be the case into the future. A mere century ago most people were able to grow most of their own food, make their own clothes and maintain their own homes using their birthright, the common heritage of skills and knowledge combined with local resources. What they did not provide for themselves came from known actors working in specific localities which the householder could identify. The quality of craftsmanship reflected in the product was part of the satisfaction in its use acquired by the householder. Mass production and mass transportation systems have fractured that human (spiritual) bond between maker and user.

In her diagrams Helga Moss sketches the route of one single product from the natural world to her household. This enables us to create an overview of the whole picture in our minds. It is important here to take time to study those diagrams. The temptation, in our restless world of today, is to allow our minds to glaze over, to pass over such simple representation of a complex issue, to pass on to more urgent thoughts. The deceptively simple diagrams show how a single item reaches our household via a network of manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers and transport systems, each item of which draws upon the work of a host of other households and the natural resources of the planet.

Helga Moss links over-consumption of material goods and services in the West with poverty, exploited labour and lack of resources in the South. The official measures to combat third world poverty have often been based upon population

control, in the form of contraception and mass sterilization programmes. However, the question is not how to control human population, but how we relate to the earth's eco-systems: "What is the earth's carrying capacity for agribusinesses," asks Helga Moss, "for world market, profit-oriented industrialists, for the military, or presidents? How can the 'number and activities' of these people be 'reconciled with the laws of nature'?" The ongoing quests to find ways to reduce our dependence upon "the exploitative and energy-consuming global household" could provide an exciting departure from the prevailing gloom and despondency at the state of the world.

In her final section entitled unpromisingly "Fertility and the North" Helga Moss provides a springboard for the study of the fundamental question of our times: how do mothers, not as salaried professionals or industrial workers but *as mothers*, relate to the market economy? As Helga Moss notes:

"If you are totally dependent upon the market economy - working long hours, buying all the things you need - you have neither the motivation nor the surplus energy to put into extensive social networking at community level."

In the industrialised North, it is expected that men and women will be out at work during the working week. Hence for the few diehard stay-at-home mums, motherhood is "loneliness". Currently, there is no political, economic or social support for those parents, particularly mothers, who recognise the importance

of being at home with the very, very young.²

Helga Moss identifies the lack of social bonding which flows from the dependence of each individual household upon the exploitative, labour-demanding and energy-consuming global market. In societies where such dependence is less all-consuming, where products and services can be freely exchanged independently of the global financial system, material survival is organised through social networks of kinship and friendship. Frequent inter-personal interaction in a variety of situations creates social networks which provide the social and emotional bonds so essential to a living local community. In the North, communities are torn apart by the way production and reproduction are organised. Hence “women’s reproductive choices are made within a framework of social poverty”.

Research into Northern women’s perceptions of the childcare choices available to them under a free market system suggests a high degree of malaise. As early as the 1990s perceived lack of satisfactory choice, including lack of time, energy, money, family and community support was already registering in rising health problems amongst families. This suggests that the women’s movement might well explore ways to restructure the local communities in which we live by breaking out of our total dependence upon the ‘free’ market economy for the material supplies to our households. What was once merely an interesting possibility is fast becoming an urgent necessity. It is now essential to

link child care policies with care of the natural environment.

As Hazel Henderson and Helga Moss were writing the above-cited texts, the very first ‘feminist economists’ were establishing their careers as academics. In order to meet the demands of a well-paid professional career it was necessary for a mother to employ low-paid labour to perform the necessary washing, cleaning, cooking and child-care duties essential to the running of their Households. With rare exceptions (See the *Wages for Housework* movement) working women often regard household and child care tasks as being of low priority, of no significance or importance, much as men have always done throughout the ages. As a result there is mounting evidence that women are increasingly reluctant to spend their time and resources on starting a family. Making this observation, Al Aynsley-Green recently noted:

“Nonetheless, the challenge for us is not so much the number of babies but the need for them to become healthy, educated, creative and resilient and happy children to make their way in life with the skills for those able to be productive workers and parents to support our own ageing population.”³

A sentence worth re-reading! It is perhaps time to set aside the needs of “our own ageing population” in order to consider the needs of babies being born today. And that cannot be done without taking the needs, skills, talents and resources of the mothers. The human infant is born helpless, and so has a lot to learn. In those vital first three years the baby must learn to walk, to speak and to think.⁴ Yet

in mainstream educational literature there is virtually no guidance available as to how parents, and mothers in particular, may best meet those needs.

More significantly, the question is - why do we want children to become talented and skilled adults? Is it so that they can become productive members of the labour force and reproduce themselves successfully? For some guidance on the purpose of human life on earth we can turn to the developmental approach to childhood development. Rudolf Steiner advocated three distinct learning strategies for each of the three stages of human development from birth to full adulthood. Each of these stages lasts about seven years. The first stage lasting from birth to 6 years, is when children learn best by being in a secure, stable environment, free to experiment, imitate and play freely. The second stage of elementary education lasts from age 7 to 13 and is marked by the loss of the baby teeth. The child is now ready for formal learning, for the cultivation of artistic and emotional skills through arts, crafts and story-telling. In the third developmental stage, from 14 years old and up, children are taught by specialist teachers and are supposed to learn through their own thinking and judgement.

Although reams have been written, studied and practised on the themes of Waldorf-Steiner education from 'pre-school' aged about 3 years, and upwards to teacher training levels, there is very little support given from any quarter to parents, particularly mothers, on how to set about providing soundly for the needs of every 0 to 3 year old.

Since industrialisation, the needs of the new-born child have best been met in the farming homestead, where there is constant routine, with bustle and purposeful activity interspersed with rest, where the sound of the familiar voice of mother or primary carer can be detected, though perhaps at a distance, and where there is ready access to the plants and animals of the natural world. The clinical nursery setting of an urban flat may provide clean food and clothing, but is a disastrous learning environment for a human being aged 0-6.

Over the quarter of a century since publication of Helga Moss's key paper, ecological degradation and social disintegration, in North and South, have escalated to epidemic proportions. Deteriorating standards of child mental and physical health give added weight to the case for a revolutionary change in our thinking leading to informed change in our home economics and arts of domestic management. Children are being born into a world of unprecedented confusion, complexity and ecological disintegration, where widespread poverty exists alongside pockets of extreme plenty. The task ahead is to find others of like mind in our own local communities so that we can study the situation locally and take informed positive direct action. Presently parents, teachers and the community as a whole continue to feed children into the waged and salaried financial-industrial economy, the very system that is the source of all our troubles.

We are addicted to money: money has become a socially acceptable addiction. We reach for it compulsively, though it

does not bring satisfaction. We are so addicted to getting and spending money that we think we have no time to think, to take stock of our assets, to find our bearings and to care appropriately for our children.

The task is to turn money from master to useful tool. Start, perhaps with the key question - where did my last meal come from? Who produced it? Under what conditions? Is it safe for a child to eat? Commercially produced foods that come from far away require preserving from pests and decay - and that requires the use of pesticides, packaging and various agro-chemicals. A bought apple should be peeled before it is given to a child to eat, to remove the poisons with which it has been sprayed. Consumption of contaminated foods is known to contribute to cancers and other forms of

disease. What is the alternative? How do you find out more?

How much food could be obtained from known local sources? How much might we grow for ourselves? What are the benefits for our lifestyles of renewing physical contact with the natural world, especially for our children? There is plenty of information on the internet. Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN) <https://www.pan-uk.org/> is a useful starting point. However, the world's political, economic and social malaise is too serious to be left to spasmodic action by individuals. What is necessary is informed action based upon group study of the resources available to every local community. And that is something in which all can participate.

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- ¹ Hazel Henderson, "Beyond GNP" in Wendy Harcourt (ed) *Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development* Zed Books
- ² Reference is made in Aynsley-Green, p34, to Mothers At Home Matter, <https://mothersathomematter.co.uk/>
- ³ Al Aynsley-Green, (2018) *The British Betrayal of Childhood: Challenging Uncomfortable Truths and Bringing About Change* Routledge. p.47
- ⁴ Karl König, (1957/2007) *The First Three Years of the Child: Walking, Speaking, Thinking*, Floris Books (2005 edition).

"Protests are incomplete, I think, because they are by definition negative. You cannot protest for anything. The positive thing that protest is supposed to do is "raise consciousness," but it can raise consciousness on to the level of protest. So far as protest itself is concerned, the raised consciousness is on its own. It appears to be possible to "raise" your consciousness without changing it—and so to keep protesting forever. ... A garden [on the other hand] gives interest to a place, and it proves one's place interesting and worthy of interest. It works directly against the feeling—the source of a lot of our 'environmental' troubles—that in order to be diverted or entertained or to 'make life interesting,' it is necessary to draw upon some distant resource—turn on the TV or take a trip."

Wendell Berry

Nature and Grace

Dinah Livingstone

The book comes in the post,
my first published translation,
Karl Rahner's *Nature and Grace*
I was paid £70.

Pregnant with my first child
I went straight out to buy an early
fully automatic washing machine
for the muslin and terry towelling
and the mountains of the rest.

My husband was angry:
'You should have consulted me,'
he said, 'it's *our* money.'
I replied: 'It's *our* washing.'
He looked bewildered,
the idea had not occurred.

We liked theology and discussed
whether technology
doesn't destroy nature but perfects it.
Would he have preferred
a wife stooped over the sink?
Appliances, I maintain, are an asset.

What is a gift and cannot be bought
is the moment of grace
when after all your sweat
the printed book arrives and the
publisher praises your translation.
That can't be done by machine.

Or you write what you didn't expect
and it is beyond prose - a poem.
And when, at last, your living child is born,
you see his face and the midwife .
gives you him to hold,
himself and snuffing in your arms.

'Nature and Grace' is reprinted with
permission from Dinah Livingstone's
collection *Embodiment* (Katabasis, London
2019). The poem is set in 1962/3. Dinah is

a poet, translator and editor of the magazine
Sofia. Her translations include *The Eye of the
Needle* by Jon Sobrino SJ (Darton Longman
and Todd, London 2008). Her most recent
prose book is *The Making of Humanity:
Poetic Vision and Kindness*
More info: katabasis.co.uk/dinah.html

Anarchism Explained

Peter Maurin

They and We

People say:

"They don't do this,
they don't do that,
they ought to do this,
they ought to do that."
Always "They"
and never "I."

People should say:

"They are crazy
for doing this
and not doing that
but I don't need
to be crazy
the way they are crazy."
The Communitarian¹ Revolution
is basically
a personal revolution.
It starts with I,
not with They.
One I plus one I
makes two I's
and two I's make We.
We is a community,
while "they" is a crowd.

Peter Maurin, *The Green Revolution*,
published by Francis of Assisi House,
Chicago Catholic Worker House of
Hospitality, 1976 revised edition, p55.

¹ Communitarian means anarchist

Wildcat and the Eurofighter

Frances Hutchinson

"In the materialistic world of today people only *appear* to be better off than they were in pre-industrial times, because the accounting measures of the financial system are taken at face value. Hence in order to meet the demands of the formal economy, individual family members feel obliged to prioritise the earning and spending of money. Money management comes before all other considerations in their daily lives. As a result, family time evaporates into thin air, as does culture, the arts, community, care for the land, meaningful contacts with the natural world and awareness of the spiritual world." Since Jeremy Seabrook wrote those words, so long ago, the obsession with the flickering screen, digital communications and the 5G networks as a whole has become an epidemic. As we spin around the world at ever increasing speeds, *we are happy to be paid* to spew out plastics, electronic gadgets and machines that have *been designed to become obsolescent and hence have to be disposed of*. Whether we are the workers/producers, the consumers, the designers, the mothers, the accountants or the teachers of others to do the same matters little. Like it or not, we are all, without exception, enslaved by the money system. The question lingers in the air – what is the alternative?

Wildcat Cartoons

In the last decades of the 20th century a series of Wildcat Cartoons was published by Freedom Press and circulated widely in green, peace, anarchist and socialist circles. Throughout the cartoons Wildcat expresses frustration at the widespread inability of the ordinary man and woman in the street (depicted as MR BLOCK in the cartoons) to see the wood for the trees. Blind faith in technological progress in science, health, and engineering of all kinds, makes people content to have their knowledge produced for them, to allow health and education measures to be organised for them by the experts, and to allow their rights and freedoms to be determined by the bosses. The result is near universal paralysis of the moral and political imagination. Blind acceptance of the language of materialism, and of the necessity for economic growth, leads to unquestioning support for the industrial mode of production, giving rise to the firm conviction that those who do not work-for-money should not eat. The Cartoons show that, alongside the idolatry of scientific progress and the corruption of language and learning, there has been a progressive loss of confidence in the political and legal process.

A Wildcat cartoon, published in 1999, questioned the necessity for an industrial

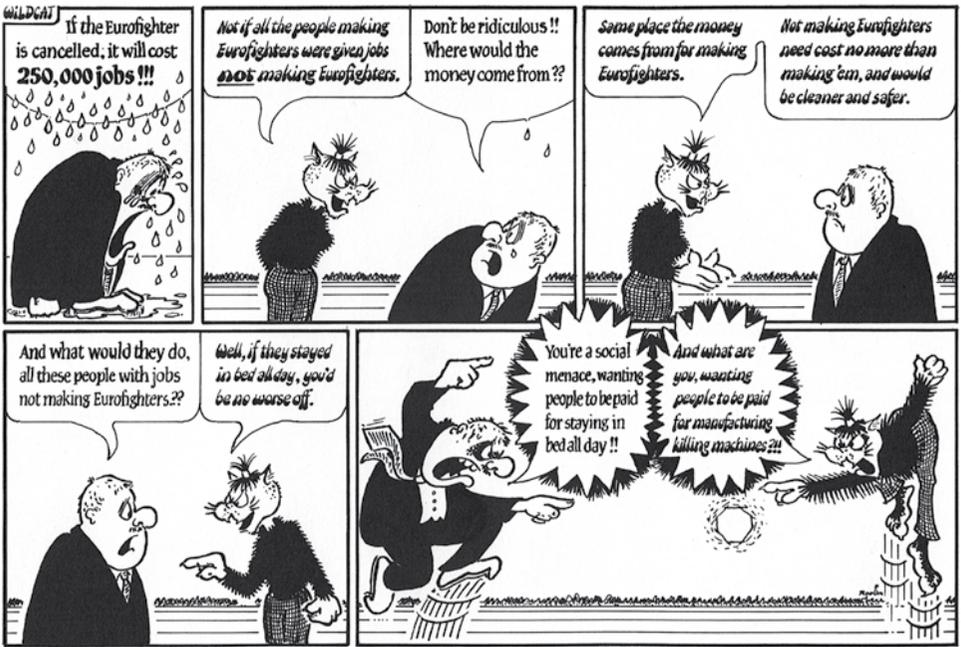
workforce to manufacture fighter planes for export in order to maintain economic growth and hence employment.¹ Since then, production of aircraft designed to drop bombs upon civilian populations has continued relentlessly. In 2016, for example, a contract was signed for 22 single-seat and six twin-seat Eurofighters of Tranche 3 standard, equipped with the E-Scan radar, to be supplied to the State of Kuwait. The State of Kuwait is the eighth customer in the programme and the third customer in the Gulf Region next to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman. Speaking on behalf of the consortium and its Eurofighter Partner Companies (EPC) the CEO of Eurofighter, Volker Paltzo, said: “We are delighted to officially welcome the State of Kuwait as a new member of the Eurofighter family”.²

The Eurofighter is just a single example of technological and scientific ‘progress’ rampaging out of the control of humanity. The Wildcat cartoon makes the essential point. Citizens seek jobs because work offers them a money income, and money offers the worker the right to claim a share of the production of society as a whole in terms of food, clothing and housing. Production of Eurofighters (and cars, weapons, aircraft, food clothing and white goods etc. etc.) in increasing numbers boosts the chrematistical, money-measured economy, whilst devastating oikonomia, the real-life economy of families and nature.³

Mounting unease at the strains put upon individual lives and the world of nature has led to increasing questioning of the policies and actions which we endorse

as workers and as citizens. Why must we – why can we? – ‘find the money’ to pay people to make Eurofighters (etc., etc.), when we could more sensibly re-route our energies and resources into feeding the starving, cleaning the house, tending the garden, caring for the sick, farming, writing bad poetry – or even taking the burden of responsibility for the care and upbringing of a child? Two decades earlier, Ivan Illich used the term “the industrialisation of man” to describe the convergence of corporate monopolies upon all social institutions⁴. The corporate world is shaping our thoughts on what it is to live and work and be a human being.

As humanity embarks upon uncharted waters, it would make sense to look again at traditional village life. Although their technologies, resources and belief systems varied widely, traditional societies of the past displayed common features. The chessboard can be used as an analogy. The pawns appear to be the least important players on the board. Yet without pawns there would be no powerful positions to be held by kings and their henchmen. The pawns at ground level are far from stupid. On the contrary, as peasant cultivators they are in physical, intellectual and spiritual contact with the land and its living plants and animals. Furthermore, they hold in their hands, eyes and brains the essential skills necessary for the tending of the land, the maintenance of the Household, all the building and crafting of materials and implements, and the weaving of stories, song and dance. In the game of chess the pawns appear expendable. In real life all worldly power depends upon their



loyalty and support. Withdrawal of that support spells the downfall of all powers that be. Hence the present powers of the corporate world focus their attention on implanting ignorance and apathy across the social order, whilst destroying the credibility of identifiable figureheads who might rock the corporate boat.

On the chessboard of traditional social orders the king and queen are the powerful figures, with the Queen representing the pawns and all the women. She is more powerful than the King. She supports the King, and her loss spells defeat. The King is further supported by the Castle, the military-political forces of law and order, and by the spiritual belief system represented by the Bishop. The social system is reflected from the nation state down through the local government area to the Household

set in community. Throughout the system, the work is done by the mass of pawns, with the women standing on equal footing with the men. Our present plight stems from the confusion resulting from the practice of working-for-money in the waged and salaried slavery system. Under this system, work undertaken *outside* the farming Household is accounted (deemed to have value), whilst voluntary work undertaken in the *inside* the Household is left entirely out of the reckoning. Expansion of the industrial mode of production, distribution and exchange has been maintained, up to this point in time, by the free resources of the Household and the natural world. It is now becoming increasingly difficult to turn a blind eye to the signs of approaching catastrophe that must result from increasing ignorance of the necessity to maintain the viability of the real, as opposed to the

financial, economy.

As the writings of Jay Griffiths and many others tell us, traditional societies retain the love of the natural world and the sense of the spiritual that is born in childhoods rooted in the land.⁵ Since eating is an agricultural act, our present urban culture of Western 'civilisation' necessarily retains the physical links with the land. But children born in an urban setting live under the illusion that money provides their parents with food, clothing, housing and the other necessities of life.

The revolutionary call is to take a child's eye view of every choice we make, so that we can bring local resources under local control. The starting point is to change our assumptions about the necessity to engage in waged and salaried slavery. During the age of the industrial machine, labour became a commodity, so that those who supplied it abdicated their responsibility for the acts which they performed whilst in the service of the employing body, be it a private firm, corporation or government department. The challenge is for us to fight free of the employment system. The alternative is to progress along the business as usual route into an increasingly intolerable and unsustainable future. The task ahead is to welcome every newly born child into a progressively more sustainable world. For that to happen it is necessary for each Household to re-think its strategies of getting and spending money, re-ordering its priorities in the light of solid factual information as it continues to unfold. All the signs are that already families are taking up the challenge.⁶

In the complex institutional networks of late industrial capitalism, the paths taken by collusion and consensus are less easy to detect. Nevertheless, the entire rotten system that produces wars, poverty amidst plenty and ecological degradation on an increasing scale would collapse over night were it not for the collusion and cooperation of the mass of individuals who are content to go along with it for the perks they get out of it. Rich or poor, each individual gains a sufficiency of comfort and status to maintain their active support for the system. Anarchistic individualism is nothing more than a term recognising the truth of the fact that only the active and informed consent of all can lead to a sustainable future.

In our everyday actions as family members, workers (voluntary and paid), consumers and citizens, we give our active consent to the collective actions of other individuals throughout the social sphere. We collude, for good or ill, in the political, economic and cultural institutions of the planet. We may resent 'having' to work for a money wage or salary. But as we do so we give our assent to the system. Even the slave, forced to work under threat of starvation, beating or death, gives consent as he or she performs the work demanded. Recognising this fundamental fact, calls all of us to review our relationship with the social order as a whole. The task is to relate the world-wide Women for Life on Earth (WLOE) movement to Rudolf Steiner's teachings on the practicalities of social threefolding. WLOE is an international women's movement for peace, ecology and social justice. Central

to this movement is the awareness that we do not have one world economy, but three. In addition to the industrial, finance-driven economy, and crucial to its very existence, are the household and the cultivation economies.

In a series of refereed papers, Hilkka Pietilä⁷ explored the relationship between the three elements of the human economy. The dominant *monetized industrial economy*, the only one recognised by mainstream economics, is supported not only by the *Household economy* but also by the *cultivation economy* of farming and the natural world. Long before the invention of the global financial system and the industrialisation to which it gave rise, local homesteads set within the countryside were self-evidently the source of wealth and well-being. The major blind spot in mainstream economic thinking is described by Pietilä as failure to recognise that, without the *Household economy* and the *Cultivation economy*, there would be no production, distribution or exchange, no financial

economy, no markets whatsoever. The market/industrialized money economy is totally dependent upon the twin supporting pillars of the Household and the living world of the planet.

The challenge is to allow thinking outside the box to permeate and determine all our practical, everyday acts. How we spend every £1 of ‘our’ money, and every hour of our time, impacts upon the lives of untold thousands of others. The urgent necessity would seem to be to provide children with a learning environment free from the shackles of waged and salaried slavery. Since the children of today are the citizens of the future, this is a task to be shouldered by parents, teachers and the local community as a whole. The starting point could well be for you, the reader, to show the Wildcat Cartoons to family, friends and acquaintances with a view to generating that most precious of tools: meaningful, face-to-face, living *conversation*.

NOTE: The Wildcat Cartoon is copyrighted by Freedom Press and is reprinted with permission on terms as stated.

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- ¹ Donald Rooum, (1999) *Wildcat: Twenty Year Millennium* Freedom Press.
- ² <https://www.eurofighter.com/news-and-events/2016/04/kuwait-signs-contract-for-the-delivery-of-28-eurofighter-typhoons> (Note: in modern warfare 90% of deaths are of civilians – men, women and children living in their own local communities).
- ³ Chrematicsis is wealth created and measured without reference to the good of the family household.
- ⁴ Ivan Illich (1973) *Tools for Conviviality*, Marion Boyars (2009 edition) (pp 85)
- ⁵ Jay Griffiths (2013) *Kith: The Riddle of the Childscape*, Hamish Hamilton. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry (1994) *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era*, HarperOne.
- ⁶ See Shannon Hayes (2010) *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture*, Left to Write Press, New York. See also James Rebanks (2015) *The Shepherd's Life: A Tale of the Lake District*, Allen Lane. And also <https://mothersathomematter.co.uk/>
- ⁷ Hilkka Pietilä, (2007:2) “Unpaid Work in Households – a Counterforce to Market Globalization” <http://www.hilkkapietila.net/en/>

How to take over your town: the inside story of a local revolution

John Harris

They are passionate about their community, know what the issues are – and are sick to death of party politics. Meet the independent groups from Devon to London who are seizing control

A quiet revolution has begun in the Devon town of Buckfastleigh. Its compact high street, functional-looking industrial estate and population of 3,300 suggest a place modestly getting on with business. But, while it may go unnoticed by those whooshing past on the A38, or tourists at nearby Buckfast Abbey, there is something happening in Buckfastleigh. That something is a radical reinvention of the way that power works at a local level, based on a kind of politics that has nothing to do with the traditional party system. And it is authored not in a Whitehall ministry, but in towns, villages and neighbourhoods – where it is having a real impact on some of the services people most care about.

Pam Barrett is a 50-year-old civil servant who has lived in the town for 12 years and talks with a mixture of breathless passion and fearsome expertise. Her political biography begins with the local outdoor pool and park, for which she managed to bring in about £300,000 of outside funding – including big donations

from Sport England. Saving the pool from closure – and upgrading it and the park – may sound like the most local of issues, but it broadens into a story centred on one key subject: 10 years of cuts, and what austerity has done to a town with high levels of what politicians call social exclusion.

“It felt to me as if we had a properly depressed town,” she says. “The carpet factory here had closed, and loads of people had lost their jobs. All our services were cut. Our buses have been hacked right back and the fares are through the roof. And when the district council said it was going to close the pool, the town council’s view was just: ‘Oh gosh – there goes another thing.’”

“I was furious that we were left here with nothing. It takes an anger to do what we have done.”

By 2015, Barrett had joined a loosely affiliated group of local people trying to parry the worst of the cuts – but, she says, they repeatedly hit a wall of obstruction and resistance, not least at Buckfastleigh’s town council. “It was almost as if [they were saying]: ‘This is none of your business,’” she says. There were 12 seats on the council, but there had not been an election for at least

20 years. In that year's local elections, they challenged the incumbents with the Buckfastleigh Independent Group (BIG). Promising to make the council more open and inclusive, and to concentrate on solving the town's problems, nine BIG candidates were elected, meaning they gained control of the council. They increased the local council tax precept (the small share of council tax that goes to town and parish councils), so people in the highest council-tax band paid nearly £2 a week. And they built up an impressive list of achievements: a new Citizens Advice bureau on Friday mornings, floodlights for the football pitch, a new "town ranger" ("Kind of an outdoor caretaker," says Barrett) and a school-holiday activity service for local young people called Hello Summer – all things woven into people's everyday lives.

To make all this possible, they made huge changes to the way the town council operates. For a start, its activities are chronicled on Facebook. People who are not elected councillors are free to join in with the monthly agenda at council meetings. "For the first time, we are able to say: 'We have this amount of money and this is where it goes,'" says the councillor Andy Stokes, who is also Buckfastleigh's mayor.

Barrett also has plans to widen the bounds of what the council can do. Similar new political groupings have materialised in a handful of nearby towns and villages. This, she says, will lead to sharing resources, so that vitally important but expensive services – health and safety provisions or child protection

– can be shared. She thinks that would open the way to a model of running everything from youth services to buses. Buckfastleigh is not alone. This kind of local uprising has started to occur all over the country. At the May local elections in England, one of the most noticeable changes was the huge increase in the number of independent councillors elected to local authorities, whose numbers increased nearly threefold. Tangled up in that is the proliferation of organised groups, such as BIG, that reject traditional party labels and seek control of the lowest tier of government – town and parish councils – where creative possibilities have tended to be lost in a sea of protocol and tradition. Councils at this very local level may be associated with parks, allotments, bus shelters and litter bins. But, thanks to the Localism Act 2011, they can – in theory, at least – do whatever they like, within the limits of the law.

Many of the people inspired by this growing mood of local assertiveness are looking to one town that stands as the crucible of this new movement: Frome, in Somerset (my adopted home town), where a group called Independents for Frome took power in 2011, kicking out the Tories and Liberal Democrats to take all 17 seats on the town council. The group has since introduced a new town hall, a publicly funded food bank, electric charge points for cars and a vehicle-sharing scheme. The group's modus operandi was turned into a manual for radically changing communities, written by the council's one-time leader Peter Macfadyen, and titled Flatpack Democracy. Some 4,500 copies have

been distributed; a sequel will be published this year.

Macfadyen reckons there are between 15 and 20 town and parish councils being run along the lines of the Frome model, “with a non-confrontational way of working and a participatory approach to democracy”. They include a large number in the south-west, places in Yorkshire and County Durham, and even New Zealand. Another 20 similar groupings, he says, have taken seats, but are yet to assume local power.

Why does he think the idea is spreading so fast? “Every other system of so-called democracy is now totally dysfunctional and non-representative,” he says. “And with Brexit, and what’s happening in central government, that is bound to have an impact downwards; people thinking: ‘My voice is not being heard in any way.’ We’re passionate about our environment and we know what the issues are, and how to sort the problems out.”

Down the road from Buckfastleigh is Dartmouth, a picturesque place on the Dart estuary, which attracts thousands of tourists. But beyond the half-timbered buildings clustered around the harbour is a community laid low by cuts, whose problems are worsened by the fact that Dartmouth is too big to be a village, but not sizeable enough to merit many of its own public services.

In May’s town council elections, 11 of its 16 seats were won by the new Dartmouth Initiative Group (DIG). Its most vocal representative is Dawn Shepherd, who moved there from Wolverhampton 15

years ago. Her journey to public office began when she started the local food bank. “There’s a lot of poverty here,” she says. “And, on top of that, where we are is like an island. We have no jobcentre, so it is £6 each time on the bus. Having to go somewhere else for everything adds to the poverty.”

The new political grouping was mentored by Pam Barrett from Buckfastleigh. “We didn’t understand how the process worked. The only access we had was going to the council meetings and having 15 minutes to put questions to the mayor,” says Shepherd. “Pam told us that we could make a difference; nothing was set in stone. We could run the council.” While the makeup of the old town council was disproportionately male, 10 of DIG’s candidates were women. This diversity extends to the group’s mixture of party politics. As with all the independents I meet, they insist that orthodox party divides have no relevance to politics at the most local level. “If you look at our 16 candidates, we have got leftwing people and we have got a supporter of the Brexit party,” says another DIG councillor, Ged Yardy. “We have not been elected on the basis of our previous politics. Party politics is not in the room.”

It would be easy to think of the new wave of independently run town and parish councils as something of a non-urban trend – but there is at least one shining exception. Queen’s Park in west London sits on the outer edge of the City of Westminster, and has a population of about 13,000. Almost a decade ago, a group of residents began to work towards

making their area the first part of London to have a parish council in 80 years. Two years later, their idea won a local referendum – and, in 2014, the first elections for its 12 seats were held. Although insiders are quick to point out that starting a council from scratch has hardly been a breeze, the informal grouping of people (none of whom has a party label) now in charge of an annual budget of about £150,000 have an array of achievements to their name. They include funding a youth centre blighted by cuts, bringing a disused park back into use, starting new annual festivals and creating a befriending project to support isolated and lonely older people. Ray Lancashire, 54, has been a Queen’s Park councillor for just over a year. Since the age of 10, he has lived on the Mozart estate, where any ideas of the city of Westminster being synonymous with wealth and privilege give way to a much more complex reality. His path to holding public office was defined by his work on air pollution, which local surveys have found to be well above legal limits.

Westminster council, he says, tends to understand pollution in terms of “main roads and trunk roads”, rather than “areas that don’t have high traffic, but are still really affected”. (The council says that it focuses air quality monitoring on “roads that we know are pollution hotspots, as this has the biggest knock-on effect”.) Queen’s Park’s grassroots councillors are now doing in-depth pollution studies, blazing a trail for temporary car-free “play streets” and pushing the authorities to take drastic action. “We are at ground level,” he says. “We’re passionate about our environment and we know what the

issues are, and how to sort the problems out. And we’re enthusiastic. That’s why our council is important.”

Perhaps the most unlikely example of the new local democracy is in Alderley Edge in Cheshire. The de facto capital of the north-west’s footballer belt – at various times, the home of Posh and Becks, Cristiano Ronaldo and Peter Crouch – is a remarkably affluent place: on the day I visit, the Barnardo’s charity shop is selling a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes for £150, while Marie Curie has an Alexander McQueen dress for £200. Local people regularly complain about super-rich football stars parking on double yellow lines because they think that the fines are chump change. But recently, even here there were rising complaints about the state of the public realm.

These complaints led to the rise of Alderley Edge First, whose tagline is “people before party”. On a hot Tuesday afternoon, I meet three of their prime movers in the local Caffè Nero: Mike Dudley-Jones, Geoff Hall and Rachael Grantham, whose family has run a grocery business here going back five generations. “When you came to Alderley Edge not so long ago,” says Dudley-Jones, “it was shaky at the edges: weeds in the pavement; the whole thing just looked run down. A one-horse town. And there was no one saying: ‘It doesn’t need to be like this.’”

Alderley is traditionally, solidly Tory – its MP is the Tory leadership hopeful Esther McVey. Until 2015, the Conservatives held all nine seats on its parish council, most of which had long been uncontested. But that May, a near miracle

happened. Alderley Edge First won every single one. Since then, its councillors have radically upgraded the local park, completed work on the village's trouble-plagued new health centre, saved allotments the old parish council wanted to turn into a car park, kept the local library open for an extra afternoon every week and made good on their pledge to spruce up the place – self-watering flower installations pepper the main street. When I mention party politics, all three members bristle. “It’s so irrelevant at this level,” says Grantham. “For me, it’s a realisation that normal people want to make a difference in their areas. There is a real feeling of people saying: ‘We can make a real difference in our patch.’ That is snowballing.”

Four years ago, as well as aiming at control of the parish council, Alderley Edge First also put up a candidate for

Cheshire East council, the big local authority until recently run by the Tories, and dogged by allegations of misconduct, some of which are being investigated by the police. Against formidable odds, Craig Browne – who also sits on the parish council – beat the Tories; after being re-elected a month ago, he became Cheshire East’s deputy leader. Something very striking, he says, now lurks among the champagne, expensive shoes and international hotshots: a revived sense of community spirit. “It was always there, but it was latent,” he says. “What we have done is encourage it. If people see councillors who are prepared to get their hands dirty, they think: ‘If they’re doing it, I’ll do it as well.’ That has been the biggest change.”

This article was first printed in *The Guardian* 12 June 2019

Distilled Wisdom

Richard Rohr

“If we take the world’s enduring religions at their best, we discover the distilled wisdom of the human race.”

However diverse religious traditions appear, these wisdom schools affirm a belief in the transcendent Unity of all religions and, as perennial philosophy maintains, there is a divine reality that enables universal truth to be understood.

...

For those of us living in the 21st

century—an age of globalization, mass migrations, and increasingly multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies—mutual understanding and respect, based on religious pluralism rather than religious exclusivism, are extremely critical to our survival. The insights from the perennial tradition have much to contribute in developing and strengthening multi-faith relations. Its insights help to combat religious discrimination and conflicts between and

within religious traditions, and to develop more pluralistic paths of religious spirituality. Today, in the 21st century, we see scholars and spiritual teachers forging new, more inclusive spiritual paths that recognize other religious traditions as sources of insight and wisdom. . . . While there is an underlying unity, there is also a diversity of conceptualizations of the ultimate reality, and multiple interpretations. Thus, the ultimate reality is described as at once transcendent and immanent, personal and impersonal; it is identified by diverse names (God, Yahweh, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, Nirvana or Buddhahood) and is often experienced differently. Each religion is a unique

way to know divine reality and to reach spiritual enlightenment or salvation. Does it make you nervous that I quote these teachers of perennial philosophy so openly? I hope not, but I understand why some people might be uncomfortable reading the name of God placed next to that of Allah, Shiva, or Buddha. It's not how most Christians were trained to think! But these ideas do not threaten my Christian faith in any way. Rather, they help me live it. Through the Perennial Tradition I see even more clearly that all people are my siblings, ancestors, and descendants of the divine reality I call God.

14 August 2019

After publication of her first two books, *The Sea Around Us* and *The Edge of the Sea*, Rachel Carson's article entitled "Help Your Child to Wonder" was published in *Woman's Home Companion* in July 1956. The original article, complete with illustrations and advertisements of the day, is a fascinating historical document in its own right. Rachel Carson's dream was to produce the text as a book with illustrations, but the publication of *Silent Spring* (1962) prevented her from completing this project. After her death the text, with photographs by Nick Kelsh and an Introduction by Linda Lear, was published in book form by Harper Collins in 1965.

The article can be viewed on <https://www.douglassocialcredit.com/> See Social Art Page, section headed Other Literature.

The world is upside down because there is so very little love in the home. We have no time for our children; we have no time for each other; and there is no time to enjoy each other. That is why there is so much unhappiness in the world today. Everybody seems to be in such a terrible rush, anxious for what is bigger and better and greater, and mothers and fathers often do not have time for each other, let alone their children. In the home begins the disruption of the peace of the world.

Mother Teresa

First published by Plough Publishing House

We pay tribute to William Krehm, founder of COMER, the Journal of the Committee on Monetary and Economic Reform who died in his 106th year. A lifelong student of monetary issues, Bill saw it as his task to raise the level of awareness – in Canada, and globally – on critical monetary issues, opening the way for others to proceed. His knowledge of Social Credit was without parallel. For a full obituary, together with free access to topical issues of our day see <http://www.comer.org/> .

The atmosphere, the earth, the water and the water cycle - those things are good gifts. The ecosystems, the ecosphere, those are good gifts. We have to regard them as gifts because we couldn't make them. We have to regard them as good gifts because we couldn't live without them.

Wendell Berry

Book Reviews

Reclaim Early Childhood: The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Steiner-Waldorf Early Years Education

Sebastian and Tamara Suggate
Hawthorne Press £25 pb 200 pages
ISBN: 9781912480104

Few would argue that writing in an accessible way about Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy is a straightforward task. In *Reclaim Early Childhood: The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Steiner-Waldorf Early Years Education* Sebastian and Tamara Suggate attempt to "demystify" the philosophy of Steiner Early Years Education and explain its teaching and learning practices in the light of other contemporary educational theories and systems. Questions about the place of spirituality, religion and overarching aims in modern education are but a few of the many challenging themes that are tackled head on.

Embarking on this journey one must necessarily start at the beginning, with Steiner himself and the foundations of his worldview. Here there is a danger of getting bogged down in his unique but complex blend of Platonic idealism, Aristotelian empiricism and Goethean phenomenology. The book however achieves an admirable balance between

depth and succinctness, discussing Steiner's threefold understanding of the human being, the twelve senses and his theory of child development in a style that is scholarly yet readable.

In covering this background the authors communicate not only the core elements of anthroposophy but why a solid, integrated and consistent philosophy of education in itself is important today. We have seen what happens when education systems lurch from one reform to another in response to rapidly changing political and economic priorities. Educators are left scrambling to keep up as both learning models and teaching practices are constantly re-defined in accordance with the latest targets or technologies. In all this the children who are supposed to be at the heart of education tend to disappear from view.

The essence of Steiner's phenomenological approach was to regain a clear view – through sensitive and sympathetic observation – of the individual child. The intention was to ensure that the reality of the child and childhood experiences form the basis of teaching methods, instead of abstract ideas about children's capacities in general or what they ought to achieve along a

pre-determined schedule. The authors point out that this focus on the needs and temperament of the child is crucial if education is going to be more than a narrow training for the labour market.

If not to serve purely economic interests, what then is the purpose of education from a Steiner-Waldorf perspective? It is, in the author's words, "to facilitate the development of freehood". The term "freehood" is used to distinguish Steiner's concept of freedom, as something that can only be realised by each individual inwardly, from the more common interpretation of freedom as an absence of external control or constraints. Freehood is about "learning to develop the capacity to act freely". The discussion of freedom and will are but one example of where the authors succeed in clearly expressing the relationship between philosophical foundations, guiding principles and the day-to-day practices that one might encounter in a Steiner-Waldorf setting.

Turning to those settings, the authors go on to describe the key characteristics of Waldorf kindergartens in terms of the typical environment, forms of social interaction, types of activity and play, materials and toys and the common daily, weekly and yearly rhythms. This picture includes an international perspective to give an idea of how the Waldorf approach has been adapted to or incorporated within different cultural and religious traditions. The authors also offer a brief but interesting comparison of Waldorf kindergartens with other settings, both alternative and State institutions.

The final chapter of the book is dedicated to addressing a number of challenges facing Steiner education, both those arising from within the movement and those resulting from external pressures

and questions. The authors acknowledge that some criticisms are valid while others are due largely to ongoing misconceptions about what Steiner education is really all about. Where particular kindergartens or schools have become insular or overly dogmatic in their attitudes the authors point to Steiner's original appeal to teachers to be outward looking and responsive to changing times and social needs.

A further challenge is the perception that Steiner settings will *not* adequately prepare children for school or enable them to learn the academic and technical skills demanded in today's society. The book makes clear that it is not a question of *not* teaching literacy, numeracy and information technology but a question of *when* and *how*. The early years are considered the time for laying foundations for later academic development. The authors give details of a growing body of evidence which supports the notion that working with rather than against the young child's natural inclinations is not only more enjoyable for them but more effective in the long-term.

The Suggates state that their book is "as much a defence of childhood as it is an advocacy of Steiner education". This is important, as it re-emphasises that it is the child who must be kept in focus at all times and not a system. Their aim is to deepen understanding as well as stimulate thought and they present Steiner-Waldorf not as a definitive solution but as a way forward, so long as it remains "open and self-critical".

One message that can be taken from this book is that for all the apparent strangeness of Steiner's philosophy and distinctness of Waldorf education, its ethos of freedom is not radically divergent from

mainstream liberal democratic values. It is a version of freedom that combines personal independence with social responsibility and as such it represents as many possibilities for building on

common ground as it does for forging new pathways in education.

Maria Lyons

Simplicity Parenting: Using the power of less to raise happy, secure children

Kim John Payne

Hawthorn Press (April 2019)

£16.99 336pp

ISBN 978-1-912480-03-6

‘Childhood is not a race to accumulate all of the consumer goods and stresses of adulthood in record time’.

In his book *Simplicity Parenting* Kim John Payne argues that the wealthy industrialised West is an increasingly hostile place for children and young people, albeit in far subtler ways than in other parts of the world. Building on his work with children in Asian refugee camps, Payne describes how youngsters in the United States and United Kingdom are showing signs of a ‘cumulative stress reaction’ to immersion in the ‘media rich, multi-tasking, complex, information overloaded, time pressured’ existence we now call normal daily life. This is manifesting in all varieties of health problems. Payne asserts that in children if even moderate levels of excitement or stimulation become a permanent feature of daily life, never counterbalanced by interludes of peacefulness, predictability and even boredom, stress can act as the catalyst which turns what might have been only a quirk or tendency into one of the dreaded ‘disorders’.

Seen in this light, the solution becomes

obvious. First and foremost we must reduce the stress in the daily life of our children. This can be done by a process of ‘simplification’ in four key areas: the environment, rhythms, scheduling, and exposure to the adult world.

Modifying one’s physical environment is the most tangible and perhaps manageable step in the process of simplification. When it comes to stuff, the first order of business is quite simply to get rid of as much as possible. While acknowledging the pressures that are pushing them in exactly the opposite direction, Payne urges parents to drastically reduce the amount of possessions their children have or have access to. Whether with toys, books, clothes or food, decreasing amount and variety in a child’s surroundings can help to instil the lifelong lesson that it is ‘relationships, not purchases, which sustain us emotionally’.

By gently turning our family’s attention away from the temptations of passive entertainment and instant gratification and toward more hard-won yet meaningful experiences, we encourage qualities and capacities that will be of both immediate and lasting benefit. These qualities can be further strengthened by increasing rhythm in daily life. Payne points out that any regular activity, event or chore can be made more rhythmical. The certainty of rhythms and rituals create ‘islands of consistency and security’ which punctuate the day and

ground the child in space and time and within the family world. They are like the 'place set at the table. An unquestioned invitation to participate, connect and belong'.

The same principles apply to how we organise and fill our children's time. As with too many toys, too many scheduled activities, particularly ones with fixed rules, can stifle a child's ability to be creative, independent and self-motivated. We have become so busy 'enriching' our children we have forgotten to allow them free, unstructured time in which to discover what they really love to do. Here again, balance is the key concept. It is not the particular activities themselves which cause problems, but pursuing too many at once, too intensely, or at an age which is not developmentally appropriate. When it comes to our children's schedules we must remember that as much as programmed events can be 'enriching' the spaces in between them can be equally so.

In a chapter entitled 'Filtering out the adult world' Payne discusses how worry, always a part of parenthood, seems in the last few decades to have come to define how parents relate to their children. Our 'fears and concerns for our children have eclipsed our hopes for them, and our trust'. One of the key contributors to this is over-exposure to media and the hyper-sensationalism of bad news. Anxiety sells, and it is being delivered, nicely packaged for maximum impact, right into the heart of our homes and bursting out of multiple screens all clamouring for our attention. The diet of fear and exaggerated risk to which so many of us

have become addicted is compromising our sense of perspective, and that in turn is polluting the way our children see the world. 'Too much information doesn't 'prepare' a child for a complicated world; it paralyses them.'

This fully revised edition of a book which a decade ago inspired a movement is very accessible and brimming with valuable insights. It will appeal to parents who are uneasy about the status quo but need practical suggestions for change. Likewise it will appeal to those dealing with specific problem behaviours but seeking a different set of answers from the conventional, frequently medication-based approach to child health. Payne's observations and recommendations are made with great empathy and respect for the challenges parents face, as well as their motivations. Harnessing 'the power of less' is certainly an important step in re-tuning to the true needs of children today, to seeing the world from their perspective and ensuring that perspective is allowed to matter.

Maria Lyons is founder of the Camphill Research Network, which collates, disseminates and promotes research related to Camphill and other intentional communities. She lives with her family in Aberdeen.

Austerity's Victims: living with a learning disability under Cameron and May

Neil Carpenter

Create Space Independent Publishing Platform (May 2018) 72pp

Kindle: £0.99, pb: £6.57

ISBN: 978-1984977601

There are almost a million adults living with a learning disability in the UK. Neil Carpenter's book, *Austerity's Victims: Living with a learning disability under Cameron and May* is a highly readable but disturbing exposition of how they have suffered, and continue to suffer, due to government choices.

In a compelling and straightforward way, Carpenter tells the stories of five working age men whom he has befriended in his capacity as a volunteer advocate for Cornwall Advocacy. Frank, Les, Thomas, Mark, and Danny* range in age from late twenties to early sixties, and all have found their quality of life deteriorating due to government decisions since 2010. The men's stories are much more than the 'case studies' which often accompany a report from a charity or a think tank. Carpenter has clearly developed good and friendly relationships with them, and their lives are revealed in an engaging but respectful and sensitive manner. Their stories are moving, often troubling, and are what make the book such a memorable read.

These personal narratives are set in the context of the political policies to which the men have fallen victim. Drastic cuts to local authority budgets have reduced or withdrawn the support they relied on to feel included in society, making their lives narrower and more restricted, and in

some cases more lonely.

One of the strengths of the book is the way in which it combines the personal and political. Whilst Carpenter has clearly done his research, references to statistics and documents are restricted to footnotes and don't interrupt the flow of the narrative.

There is also an analysis of the men's incomes and expenditure in comparison to the local median, and the Minimum Income Standard set by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This kind of precise bread and butter detail is almost always lacking in political debate, but is sorely needed. It's very easy for a politician to glibly talk of 'incentivising' people to get a job by cutting their benefits – not so easy when confronted with the pitifully low sums of money on which men like Les and Frank are expected to survive, and the almost complete absence of opportunities for them to get paid employment. As Carpenter says, "When I began work as a volunteer, one of my strongest impressions as I went to different day centres or visited people at home was how poor almost everyone seemed, as if poverty was an inevitable part of having a learning disability."

And yet – almost all the individuals in the book are working to some extent in a voluntary capacity, often showing great commitment and effort. One works at a centre growing salad vegetables. "He is helped by others at various points but he is the pivotal figure in what is produced there – so pivotal that he had to change his day off to Monday because the centre couldn't handle without him the heavy orders that come in on Friday."

Carpenter is clearly shocked by the inhumane way Danny was put through a Work Capability Assessment in 2016. Having slowly learned to sit, crawl, and then walk again after a severe acquired brain injury, Danny now has emphysema and other health problems to add to his difficulties. Danny's mother accompanied him to his assessment but was not allowed to help him when he struggled to answer questions.

Danny said if he had to go on to Jobseekers Allowance, with the pressure that involves, he'd be "dead in a year – it doesn't matter". When the result came through and he heard that he would lose his ESA, he broke down in tears and asked "Who appointed them? God? Worst thing they've ever had is a broken finger-nail."

After a Mandatory Reconsideration, Danny's ESA was restored, but the experience was distressing and demanding for both him and his family – and as Carpenter says, the whole process for someone in Danny's position was 'insensitive and illogical'.

The overwhelming impression one is left with after reading this book is just how terribly precarious the lives of people with a learning disability have become. An administrative hiccup, another council cut, or a callous decision by the DWP can plunge their lives into poverty and chaos, leaving them dependent on foodbanks and the kindness of neighbours to avoid starvation.

The tone of the book is admirably reasonable and restrained, but towards the end Carpenter, clearly angered by what is happening to men like Frank and Danny, expresses his feelings. He quotes the government's Work and Health Green

Paper, with its formulaic reassurances about support for people to get into work and a safety net for those who need it. "Such pronouncements would sit nicely among the 'alternative facts' of the Trump administration. Who, however, would you rather believe...the bland, seemingly soothing words of the DWP or the evidence of this book which reveals a supposed 'safety net' with gaping holes, some of them cut deliberately?" He writes about Theresa May's proclaimed commitment to 'fairness' and concludes, "the apparent commitment bears no relation to reality, to the impact that austerity has had on people like Alan and Danny. As long as it continues, for anyone with a learning disability such fairness is a lie."

Sadly, a postscript reflects how, relentlessly, austerity is continuing. Since Carpenter finished the book, funding for a scheme that enabled Thomas to go surfing was withdrawn, Cornwall Advocacy was on the brink of closure, and the roll out of PIP was causing extensive damage. Frank was not transferred to PIP from DLA, so his weekly income was cut to £115.10. Carpenter concludes, "With many cuts still to come it seems inevitable that by the time you are reading this, life for people with a learning disability will have deteriorated even further." This book is yet more evidence that austerity has been a shameful attack on those least fortunate and least able to defend themselves. One would like to think that at some stage in the future these inhumane policies will be reversed, and the politicians who devised and supported them will be held to account. This book would certainly provide compelling evidence for the prosecution.

MARCH 22, 2019

* Names and locations have been altered and information anonymised to protect identities.
© Bernadette Meaden has written about political, religious and social issues for

some years, and is strongly influenced by Christian Socialism, liberation theology and the Catholic Worker movement. She is an Ekklesia associate and regular contributor. You can follow her on Twitter: @BernaMeaden

Words out of Silence

Jill Segger

Create Space Independent Publishing
Ekklesia (May 2019)
pb 174pp
ISBN: 978 0993284280

In these turbulent times, as the President of the United States frequently and disturbingly demonstrates, anyone with access to the internet can comment on events as they happen. But as the speed and ease of our communication has increased, so the space and time for careful consideration seems to have diminished. Instant opinions become ever more polarised, views get more entrenched and divisive.

In such a context, this collection of comment pieces and poetry is both timely and countercultural. It demonstrates a radically different way of responding to the world, a way which is intellectually rigorous, emotionally connected, spiritually humble, and rooted in silence. For author Jill Segger, an active member of the Religious Society of Friends, this silence is the silence of the Quaker meeting, which has formed the bedrock of her life and values. As she says in the book's dedication, her parents gave her both a love of words and a love of silence, and it is from a deep well of this silence that her prose and poetry is drawn.

Unlike many of our current politicians and commentators, who seem to think that dogmatic certainty lends their views validity, Segger always starts from the Quaker position, "Think it possible that you may be wrong." This unfashionable starting point means that her commentary always seeks to be fair and civil, whilst searching for the truth at the heart of an issue. But that is not to say it is timid or lacking in conviction. Far from it. An unwavering belief in the core Quaker values of equality, peace, truth and simplicity mean speaking truth to power, and being unafraid of expressing an opinion which may prove unpopular. This is perhaps most evident in Segger's writing on war and peace, and society's relationship with the military, where she questions our acts of remembrance and what lies behind them.

The comment in the book is very wide-ranging, from social, political and cultural issues, to personal experiences like the death of a neighbour or recovery from surgery. This combination of the personal, political and spiritual, and the way they interact, makes the book engaging on many levels. The author manages to step back from events in a way that gives perspective, but never becomes emotionally detached. There is tenderness and compassion, and a deep appreciation of even life's simplest blessings.

Balancing the prose, and giving the book its own particular rhythm, is the poetry. The poems are short and beautiful in their clarity, often conveying a single vivid image loaded with meaning, or a fleeting but profound emotion. They seem to carry the deeper truths which the author cannot express in prose. Perhaps what they all have in common is that they seem to spring from a deep sense of connectedness, or love. Love of people,

love of community, love of music, or a love of the natural world, which began in the author's native Cumbria.

Readers from all backgrounds, religious and non-religious, may find this book thought-provoking and engaging, and ultimately, encouraging, as it tackles the most serious of issues whilst never forgetting to rejoice in what is good and true.

Bernadette Meaden

Team Human

by Douglas Rushkoff

W.W. Norton, 2019

ISBN 978-0-393-65169-0

Hb. 250pp. £14.99

Team Human is a deceptively approachable read, being arranged as a series of 100 self-contained, unobtrusively annotated micro-essays. The opening essay addresses the problem:

“Autonomous technologies, runaway markets, and weaponised media seem to have overturned civil society, paralyzing our ability to think constructively, connect meaningfully, or act purposefully. It feels as if civilization itself were on the brink, and we lack the collective willpower and coordination necessary to address issues of vital importance to the very survival of our species.”

For the New York-based professor of media theory and digital economics, award-winning author, broadcaster and commentator, “it does not have to be that way”. Rushkoff calls for a transformation

of our value systems by taking control over the economic and technological systems which are currently controlling us. As algorithms are designed to make us behave like predictable, well-defined and malleable machines, the challenge is to find new ways to communicate and act effectively for the common good. “Human beings are not the problem.” he declares. “We are the solution.”

The book contains many seemingly simple yet highly discussable insights. The author argues that the social media and the Internet generally seemed to open up communications between individuals, but have progressed to become mechanisms of social control. The notion that all forms of human communication can be used to disseminate lies and deception when controlled by powerful individuals or groups gives pause for thought. The spoken word, the written word and the printed word were followed by electronic communications, such as telegraph, radio and TV. Each could be used to disseminate falsehoods amongst the unwary, but the Internet provides the corporate world with unprecedented powers to fragment

family and community life. There is no single, identifiable problem. Technology, scientists, markets, robots, algorithms and the human appetite for progress have all created problems, but they only become problems when pursued at the expense of “more basic, organic, connected, emotional, social and spiritual sensibilities. .. We must balance our human need to remain connected to nature with our corresponding desire to influence our own reality”.

If global catastrophe is to be averted, we need to be proactive in our problem-solving. The answer is not to attempt to revert to pre-industrial conditions, any more than it is to accelerate technological development in the quest for techno-fixes. We must learn to see the technologically accelerated social, political, and economic chaos ahead of us as an invitation to more wilful participation. “We can’t go back; we must go *through*.” The challenge humanity faces is that of the whitewater rafter on encountering the rapids.

“As the raft enters the turbulence and begins to buck, the temptation is to resist the current by jamming the paddle straight down into the water and holding it as still as possible. Another temptation is to remove the paddle altogether and surrender to the current. Both strategies put the raft at the mercy of the river. The best response is to paddle harder and faster. Go with the current, making the necessary adjustments to avoid rocks and other obstacles. It’s neither resistance nor passivity, but active participation in concert with what’s happening to make it down river in one piece.”

Conscious participation sums up the message of *Team Human*. The past has brought us agriculture, writing and cities, and with them a host of challenges which are there to be met. It has also brought us “the employment model”. Since the Middle Ages the “peer-to-peer” economy has been dismantled, and everyone has become an employee, a human resource that sells their time instead of selling the value they have created. As the employment model became all-pervasive, organisers and activists came to think of prosperity in terms of everyone seeking to commodify their living hours by getting “jobs”. Technologies facilitate the production of an endless stream of products, many of which clutter up the planet and are surplus to human requirements. But the extra products cannot be simply given to house and feed the poor. “Why? Because they don’t have jobs! We punish them for not contributing, even though we don’t actually *need* more contribution.”

In the chapter entitled “Figure and Ground” we see how money, originally a useful means of exchange, is now a means of exploitation, whilst the educational institutions feed workers onto the assembly line of the machine that demands our service in return for giving us the right to live. Chapters range across the topics of the digital media, mechanomorphism, artificial intelligence natural science and spirituality and ethics. Eminently knowledgeable about the digital age, Rushkoff presents us with startling quotable quotes. As we seek salaries, health care and meaningful work we fail to notice that “in the future

envisioned by Wall Street and Silicon Valley alike, humans are just another externality”. Workers are unaware that digital surveillance technologies are being used to teach their jobs to algorithms”. Apparently we are already using AI systems to evaluate teacher performance, mortgage applications and criminal records, even though the criteria and processes are so confidential that even the companies are uncertain about the criteria being used. In the chapter on “Spirituality and Ethics” we learn of the cosmists, the early Soviet-American quest to perfect humans through “intentional evolution, moving human consciousness into the bodies of robots, conquering death, colonizing space, or uploading ourselves to computers”. Their vision informed Silicon Valley’s most influential executives, investors, professors, scientists and technologists who founded today’s biggest digital companies and the transhumanist movement as a whole. According to this line of thought, “once computers and robots can do the thinking, humans won’t even be necessary”. It will not matter that the natural environment is destroyed, since it is not required by robots or by uploaded humans. For the time being, human beings are necessary to service the machines, but once machines get better at doing things for themselves, humans will not be necessary.

The reference to Steiner’s Agricultural Course comes towards the end of the book in the chapter entitled “Natural Science”. Industrial agriculture that serves the shareholders of chemical, pesticide and bioengineering companies gets less food out of the ground

with fewer nutrients, less efficiently, more expensively, and with greater environmental devastation than small organic farming. This fact is no longer seriously challenged. Equally, it is recognised by current estimates that the earth will run out of topsoil within sixty years. The planet’s complex biosphere will survive us, but it is increasingly doubtful whether humanity will survive the ecological catastrophes and social unrest that, as things stand, would seem inevitable. Hence there is nothing to be lost, and a world to win, if we focus upon cooperative, small-scale biodynamic farming projects in every locality. We need to touch ground, to become “flow observers and pattern recognizers in our local realities and communities” so that we begin to know what is happening beyond our immediate experience. This will enable us to work with others, turning the new technologies from dangerous masters to useful tools.

The task is for humanity to work together as “team human”. The book is full of quotable quotes and highly discussable references to key texts on the social order in the age of digital technology. It forms a rousing starting point, but lacks guidance on the urgent question faced across the board by humanity as a whole: “Where do we go from here?” At this point the reader is obliged to set Rushkoff’s work into the wider context of past century. The work of Ivan Illich (1926-2002), celebrated Catholic priest, theologian and philosopher, whose notion of ‘conviviality’ accords well with the ‘team human’ concept, springs to mind. Like Illich, Rushkoff poses fundamental questions about the

assumptions upon which we base our cooperative interaction on the land and in the economy as a whole, in the field of rights and obligations, and in the institutions providing education, health care and the entire infrastructure which presently enables us to serve in the brave new world of the machine.

The challenge is to recognise the revolution in our thinking, feeling and actions that is now vitally necessary across all the institutions of the social order if humanity is to survive. Rushkoff's deceptively easy read provides an inspiring vision that will form a basis for study and debate

The British Betrayal of Childhood: Challenging Uncomfortable Truths and Bringing About Change

by Al Aynsley-Green

Routledge. £13.99. Pb.246 pp, ISBN: 978-1-138-29792-0

In 1739 the philanthropic sea captain Thomas Coram founded London's founding hospital for "the education and maintenance of exposed and deserted young children". Three centuries later, following 40 years of working with children and young people, emeritus Professor of Child Health and former Children's Commissioner for England, Sir/Dr Al Aynsley-Green acknowledges his debt to Coram. He documents the social provision for children and young people in Britain, the epicentre of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. He further explores the reasons why outcomes for the UK's children for health, education, social care, youth justice and poverty are among the worst

across the spectrum of the institutional framework of the entire world economy. We are essentially social creatures. The plain fact is that we achieve our greatest aspirations when we work together, sharing resources and pooling ideas in households and local communities. The task is to find others in our own localities who understand this fundamental truth so that we can reassert our humanity. Together we can realise greater happiness, productivity and peace.

The final essay consists of three words: "Find the others".

Dr Frances Hutchinson/ The Editor

in the developed world. He focuses on the political indifference to the importance of children in the UK, and the constant failure of communication between government departments and with other organisations.

The word 'hospital' is used in the medieval monastic sense of offering care and hospitality to the stranger, the traveller, and those who have hit upon hard times. A foundling is "an abandoned infant whose parents are not known". Figure P.2 shows Hogarth's "allegory" for the Foundling Hospital, showing Coram rescuing children and, in the background, "mothers abandoning their babies in the fields". A visitor from Mars might well ask what was going on. As our economic history books tell us, from Tudor times onwards, and with increasing frequency as the agrarian and industrial revolutions progressed, families were forced to desert their self-supporting homesteads in the rural countryside to swell the growing

towns. These were times when a child could be imprisoned for taking apples for food, and a girl of 12 could be hung for stealing a petticoat. Thus the plight of the child is documented in this eclectic account of betrayal. Destitute labour was cheap. The division of labour forced the poor to work all day long, slaving for money, keeping pace with the relentless demands of the steam or water-powered mills at the commands of the mill, mines and factory owners who sought to expand their profiteering through mass marketing. For many industrial workers 'home' became at best little more than a room in a shared tenement.

In the absence of Food Banks, many women and their children died in the hedgerows. Often the only option a destitute mother had was to abandon her child near a farm or church where it might be found and taken care of as a foundling. Thus a new breed of person, the urban worker, was born of successive generations of mothers who had to manage as best they could. Meanwhile, the idle and not-so-idle rich, those who benefited from the material prosperity generated by the mass production methods, and who were in command of national finance, law and administration, blamed poverty on the fecklessness of the poor. Thus Coram's Foundling Hospital paved the way for the social, educational, health and municipal provisions of the 19th and 20th century. Throughout, however, the health, happiness and well being of children and young people was a secondary concern. The primary consideration was the welfare of the industrial labour force in the pursuit of economic growth.

The author presents a mass of hard-hitting facts about the lives of children and young people in the UK during the second decade of the 21st century, including "soaring rates of emotional and mental ill health," the widespread incidence of self-harming and psychiatric malfunctioning in general. These may well be the inevitable result of prioritising economic growth as measured in purely economic terms, and the practice of focusing on remedial action after the horse has bolted. Midway through the book he asks: "Youth justice - is it broken, brutal and not fit for purpose?" Sadly, in our society today we have children under 18, who are by law still children, "who commit serious crimes and inflict damage on others, on communities and on society generally". The causes are attributed to "poverty, serious physiological and psychiatric disorders, epigenetic influences and especially pre-natal exposure to alcohol, substance misuse and adverse childhood experiences including inadequate parenting and domestic violence". The need for training in parenting is mentioned in passing, in all-too-brief references to *Mothers At Home Matter* (MAHM), the *Irish Promoting Positive Parenting* organisation, and *Family Links*.

According to the author, countless people, including children's authors, academics and parents are deeply concerned about the plight of childhood today. He cites the work of Sue Palmer, including her "21st Century Girls: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Daughters and What We Can Do About It, and the *Too Much Too Soon*

campaign against OFSTED and excessive testing in schools. The work abounds in detailed examples of “challenging and uncomfortable truths” about the plight of children and young people in the UK. In conclusion, he places responsibility for bringing about change fairly and squarely upon the reader:

“We have a dramatically changing demography with more people living longer and fewer working-age adults to support their needs. So, through a hard, economic lens, we need healthy, educated, creative and resilient, happy children now acquiring the life skills to make their way in life and for those who can to be productive adults and competent parents in due course.

“But, we must move away from seeing children just as an economic asset. Every child really does matter in her or his own right, including those who may never want to be a parent or be able, through disability or vulnerability, to contribute meaningfully to hard economic indicators. Are they not just as deserving of focus for their needs?”

“Moreover, children are citizens in their own right and not just the chattels of parents. They need rights to have a childhood, be protected from harm, have support to meet their needs and participate in matters that affect them – protection, provision and participation are after all the fundamental principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the world’s most important ‘road map’ for childhood.”

Even so, he remains convinced by the modern myth that humanity has progressed from the pre-industrial era when life was nasty, brutish and

short, especially for children. After all, Coram made his life as a shipwright and champion of trade with the New World in America in the mid 1700s. In the course of his travels he witnessed the struggle of the colonists “to survive disease, starvation, the harsh climate and hostile First Nation people”. In a curious double-think Aynsley-Green comes to the absurd conclusion that children and young people in “developing countries,” who lack the “wealth, health, education, information, knowledge and travel opportunities” of the developed world, must lack adequate parenting. As many recent studies have established, this is far from the case¹.

The book is full of quotable quotes of distinguished commentators on society in general and childhood in particular. The final chapter is focused on bringing about change through debate, discussion and community action at local level. This timely and thought-provoking book is packed with most valuable references to ongoing work, with suggestions about so much that could be done, and needs to be done. And, behind the scenes, the story of childhood based upon sound economics, educational and ecological childcare policies is yet to be told. The purchase of this book by parents, educationalists, academics, lawyers, politicians, administrators of all municipal services, and, above all, local libraries, is heartily recommended.

Frances Hutchinson

¹ See, e.g., Jay Griffiths Kith: *The Riddle of the Childscape*, Hamish Hamilton, 2023. Also, of course, the work of Margaret Mead.

Social Credit literature currently available in print or online.

Over the century (virtually) since Clifford Hugh Douglas first put pen to paper, a vast literature on the subject of Social Credit has appeared in print. Douglas' own works were translated into many languages, and most of his books can still be bought over the internet.

The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism

Frances Hutchinson and Brian Burkitt, (2005)
£12.99

Social Credit: Some Questions Answered

Frances Hutchinson £3

The Grip of Death:

A study of modern money, debt slavery and destructive economics

Michael Rowbotham £18

Understanding the Financial System: Social Credit Rediscovered

Frances Hutchinson (2010) £15

What Everybody REALLY Wants to Know About Money

Frances Hutchinson £12

Asses in Clover (Fictional dystopia)

Eimar O'Duffy (2003) £11

This Age of Plenty

A new conception of economics: Social Credit

Louis Even (Pilgrims of Saint Michael)

The Social Artist

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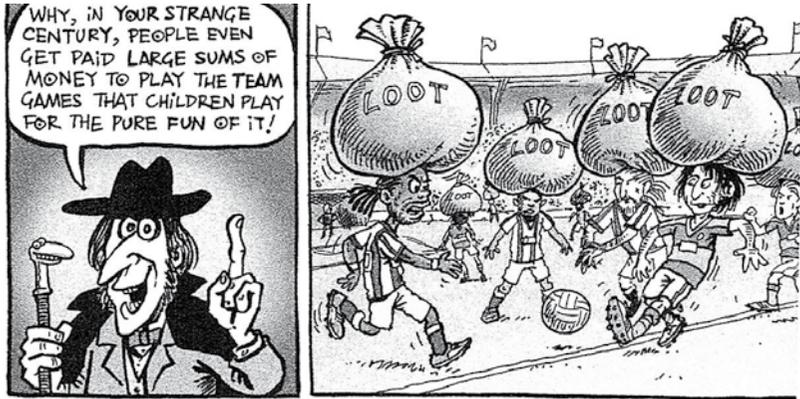
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Bloke's Progress by Kevin Jackson & Hunt Emerson
(Ruskin Comics) Page 90

We recommend

the journal *New View* as an excellent source of in-depth reflections on major issues of the day
www.newview.org.uk

The body of economic theory known as 'social credit' was studied across the world in the inter-war years of the 1920s and 1930s, as ordinary men and women struggled to understand how it was that the world could afford the waste and horror of war. The Social Credit movement was supported by leading figures in the arts, sciences, the church, politics and social activism, all of whom presented the case for peace based upon social justice and environmental sustainability.

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