



## 'The Right to Work'

One of the most fatuous aspects of contemporary mythology is the nonsense that is commonly purveyed regarding "work". Governments proclaim, for example, that they intend to provide "work for all"; at the same time, paradoxically, politicians blather about improving the "quality of life" — as if this were somehow a function of economic enslavement. Persons parade (in various degrees of physical and philosophical disarray) demanding "the right to work": as soon as this supposititious "right" is recognized, they are as likely as not to withdraw their services. These contradictions suggest that we are (perhaps) not thinking especially clearly about "work".

This point has been made previously — notably (and unexpectedly) by Karl Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, who, in spite of his simple-minded adherence to the "labour theory of values", nevertheless recognized that "if the miseries of compulsory work and the tortures of hunger have descended upon the proletariat more in number than the locusts of the Bible, it is because the proletariat itself invited them ...". The desire to remain "employed" is in fact a desire to remain fettered to "servile toil", to a regime of economic constraint.

In this, the ancients knew better than we. Lafargue quotes the Greek poet Antiparous, who celebrated in song the invention of the water-mill, a labour-saving device: "Spare the arm which turns the mill, O, millers, and sleep peacefully. .... Demeter has imposed upon the nymphs the labour of the slaves, and behold them leaping merrily over the wheel, and behold the axle tree, shaken, turning with its spokes and making the heavy rolling stone revolve". Similarly, Aristotle: "If every instrument could do its own work, if the shuttle could weave and the plektrum pluck the lyre without a guiding hand, foremen would not need workers, nor masters slaves". We do have instruments that can do their own work: this is our technological heritage of the inventiveness of man.

Labour is energy: to the extent that the productive process can be carried on with, say, the derivatives of solar energy, human energy is liberated from the need to labour. The only sane reason for having technology is to increase productive efficiency, to liberate human energy from servile functions. If "work" is indeed so absolute a value, so elevated a goal, let us all become peasants with tablespoons moving mountains (a condition eulogized most remarkably by Mao Tse-tung): we shall be "fully employed"; we shall also be fully controlled.

The point is that "the right to work" is the right to remain enslaved. Anyone who cannot see the contradiction here is more to be pitied than cajoled. A "right" is something that a person has; conditional livelihood implies that persons have nothing. If we insist upon "the right to work", we might as well insist upon "the right to have boulders placed upon our chests". If somebody wants to be so pressed, that (I suppose) is his prerogative. However, one hopes that his "right" will not become an obligation imposed upon everyone else.

Men and women do have work which is proper to them; it is not, however, the compulsory functionalism envisaged by the 'full employment freaks'. Thomas Aquinas has observed that 'sin' is the abdication of one's proper condition of being: is man's proper state (other than in materialist philosophies) "labour"? Or is it not something else, of which the freedom from constraint is at least a partial condition? The proper 'work' of men and women is self-development, not self-abnegation before someone else's 'executive will'. The "right (not obligation) to work" — if it is to mean anything at all — must include the right of persons to pursue their proper end.

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## Our Policy

SEED aspires to fulfil a unique role transcending the functions of other magazines and journals.

Our purpose is neither to propagandize in the sense of promoting some fixed point of view or body of thought nor merely to comment on current events.

Our partisanship does not extend beyond two considerations. Firstly, we believe that reality does exist: it is not a matter of opinion and will assert its authority over all opinions that contradict it. All sanctions reside in reality; opinion has none. Secondly, we believe in the desirability of extending human freedom. Genuine freedom is contingent upon our comprehension of reality, since to the extent that men disregard reality, they court personal and social disaster.

In other words, far from conforming to the modern view that value judgments are to be avoided, SEED will intentionally consist of a succession of value judgments, which will constitute the principal criterion of its success. Man cannot approach truth without rigorous formation of value judgments and perfecting of definitions. Discovery and refinement of the correct principles for human action and association will be the focus of our attention within the field of reality. If we carry our investigation of the nature of reality far enough, we shall illuminate the way to the formulation of sound policy.

We have no delusions about the facility of the course on which we are embarking. It is possibly the most difficult course open to us. However, its value should be proportional to the efforts it requires. If the distractions to intelligence and will which characterize contemporary society are, as we believe them to be, fundamentally unsatisfying, we are confident that some seekers of truth will involve themselves in the experiment that SEED represents. Such persons are the only ones capable of responding to such an experiment.

We approach our undertaking in the spirit of making an offering that will call forth latent creative capacities. If the ideas that SEED disseminates have validity and settle in good soil, they will grow. Moreover, their growth will be progressive and cumulative. SEED will serve as a medium permitting the cross-fertilization of adventurous intellects, thereby diminishing the effects of the entropic phenomenon that paralyzes development by compelling men to struggle to find truths that they have lost sight of and had to rediscover repeatedly during the past.

If our project is conducted correctly, it will at the least generate a new conceptual vigour among a segment of the community — and perhaps even result in the formation of new men.



## Gutted Democracy

Many analyses of contemporary politics have demonstrated how the party system hampers the electorate in its aspirations (meagre as these may be) to control government policy. No extraordinary mental effort is required to comprehend that discipline by the party and discipline by the voter are inevitably incompatible. Faced with a choice between these masters, the elected official almost invariably opts for respectability in the eyes of the party hierarchy. Its influence upon his political fortunes has an immediacy and potency with which, alas, nothing else effectively competes.

The party system disfranchises the voter by narrowing his range of choice. Thus, a voter presented with 'platforms' by parties A, B, and C has, at most, three choices of policy regarding any particular question. Moreover, these choices are usually restricted to matters of detail rather than fundamentals. For example, the simple right to contract out is seldom included among the alternatives offered.

It follows that the apparent opposition of different party policies is largely a sham. Fiery and dogmatic denunciations of rival groups comprise part of the make-believe designed to maintain the credibility of the system. One can best explain this, perhaps, by means of analogy with a prize fight. Two boxers may batter each other into insensibility in the ring. The fight promoter wants nothing better. The advantages of the exercise to the pugilists are dubious, but to him they are certain. The political life in our country resembles a prize fight more every day; and, if not all the disputations are staged, many have such an air about them. The time has come to probe through the ham acting and identify the 'promoters' who prosper in comfortable anonymity behind the scenes—regardless of who triumphs on the hustings.

An additional reason for which the party system is encouraged is found in the fact that it provides an outlet for much reforming zeal, which might otherwise become channelled in ways that pose a real threat to the status quo.

Therefore, we should not be surprised to see various kinds of action being taken to reinforce the party game. Evidence of the desire to facilitate its survival in the

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## Metrication

One technique for confusing people is the process of abstraction from reality, that is, the dissociation of concrete experience from the means by which we communicate about that experience. We are witnessing an example of this process in the introduction of metrication into societies whose common system of measurement has for centuries been the British system, which, whether or not it is less "efficient", is part of the cultural and experiential heritage of those societies. While metrication is arguably an unimportant issue in itself, it is symptomatic of a tendency which has serious implications.

At one point in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the following conversation occurs between an elderly "prole" and a barman:

"And what in hell's name *is* a pint?" said the barman, leaning forward with the tips of his fingers on the counter.

"'Ark at 'im! Calls 'isself a barman and don't know what a pint is! Why, a pint's the 'alf of a quart, and there's four quarts to the gallon. 'Ave to teach you the A,B,C next."

"Never heard of 'em," said the barman shortly. "Litre and half litre— that's all we serve. There's glasses on the shelf in front of you."<sup>1</sup>

The incident, admittedly a small one, reveals an aspect of an important point in Orwell's book— the shortening of the cultural memory as a means of political control. Orwell describes other, more blatant, techniques for effecting this destruction of memory, for example, book-burning, revision of "news" (and history), re-naming of places, and the "streamlining" of traditional language. Nevertheless, a change in the system of measurement is, inevitably, part of this process and should be taken seriously.

### Some Questions

Which brings us to the question of metrication, to which the English-speaking world is now being subjected. Before even raising the question of cultural iconoclasm, one must pose a number of queries about metrication. One, of course, is "Why?" The argument is that the metric system is "more efficient", less "clumsy" than what we have at the moment. Leaving out of account for the moment that question-begging term "efficient", it seems clear that countries on the British system (notably, the United States) have attained at least as much material success as those on the metric system. Another is, "Who asked us?" A change in the system of mensuration— which affects all of us in our everyday lives— is a significant cultural change. But, who asked us if we wanted that change? I for one re-

call no bureaucratic committee consulting me for my opinion; I remember no plebiscite on this question. Someone, obscured by bureaucratic anonymity, somewhere (in Ottawa? New York? Yucatan?) decided that metrication would be a desirable thing. But nobody gave the people whom it will affect most radically a chance to say "yea" or "nay" to its supposititious desirability.

A third question is, "Why now?" At a time when we are barraged with reports of wars (and rumours of wars), inflation, and imminent economic cataclysm, why should our highly-paid bureaucrats be directing their much-touted (but hardly imposing) intelligence and energy to playing games with numbers? In whose interest is it to divert (or confuse) the population with "conversion tables" at a time when real problems are so pressing and so dangerous? If we can be made to use up our energy trying to decide what kind of coat to wear, we will obviously have less inclination to concentrate on more important issues (for example, how much longer we will even have the power to decide what kind of coat we will wear<sup>2</sup>).

Having said this, I want now to look more closely at what metrication (or any change in the system of measurement) entails psychologically and culturally. It must first be noted that a system of measurement is a system of communication, of signs which stand for things. In this, it is like language— the sign is not the thing, but the relationship of the sign to the thing signified is important. Thus, any system of measurement is *initially* to some extent arbitrary. However, through constant, habitual, or traditional association of the sign with a portion of reality, the system of measurement becomes less arbitrary; it becomes an integral aspect of our experience; it becomes 'real'.

### Signs and Things

While, as I have said, a system of measurement is initially arbitrary, it should be noted that its basis

can be more or less real in terms of our experience. Thus, for example, it was not necessary to adopt the "yard" as a unit of measurement in any absolute sense. But the fact that the yard originally had reference to the length of a man's arm means that the measure is directly related to something in our immediate experience—part of a person's body. In the case of a "foot" the relationship is even more immediate: the word for the measure is the same as the word for the thing to which the measure relates; the word is much more symbolically effective than a purely arbitrary term would have been. Thus, in the British system, measurement is (or was) a quite concrete thing, abstracted as little as possible from people's actual experience. Moreover, it tends to relate to the dimensions of the human body, implying (perhaps) the philosophical notion that systems are made for men, and not vice versa. Look, on the other hand, at the meter: originally, it was defined as the equivalent of one ten-millionth of the distance from one of the earth's poles to the Equator (more recently, it has been discerned that this distance is actually 10,000,880 standard meters). This means virtually nothing in terms of the average person's experience: who has travelled in a straight line from the Pole to the Equator? who can imagine what one ten-millionth of anything is like? We might as well ask people to visualize Planck's constant, which, however useful it may be in certain circumstances, bears no experiential relationship to people's ordinary existence.

A recently-published letter to the *Edmonton Journal* argued that, because of the metric system, education in Europe is more "efficient" than in countries on the British system: the writer maintained that the year saved by European students who do not have to learn the complicated British system allows them to go on to more "important" studies—philosophy, for example. One wonders if the habit of mind evident in acquiescence in metric measures—that is, abstraction from reality for the sake of constructing arbitrary "ideal" models—does not somehow correlate with the history of political instability in Europe. On the other hand, Britain (however imperfectly) has maintained a stable tradition of constitutional freedom and order: those countries with abstract, "efficient" constitutions seem, strangely, always to be the first to acquiesce in totalitarianism.

## Dissociation

Not only is the British system arguably initially closer (and, therefore, more relevant) to the common experience of men, but it has certainly attained that characteristic in the areas where it is used. I have already made the point that any system of communication (by its nature "symbolic") acquires genuine significance through its constant or habitual association with the reality for which it stands. We have become accustomed to *know* the meaning of the numbers on the Fahrenheit scale: we know that 80° is hot. On the other hand, we do not know that 27° is hot. Certainly, we can 'figure it out' by converting to the Fahrenheit scale, but we do not, automatically, relate 27° to sitting in the warm sun, drinking lemonade, and watching butterflies. The whole accumulated experience (and it is difficult to calculate) associated with 80°F is alien to 27°C: that relation of experience to the system of symbols has to be re-learned. It is not simply a matter of transference, of learning a new, less complicated set of numbers; it is a question of re-learning how certain figures represent our experience. The process is precisely analogous to learning a new language: anyone who has done so will tell you that the major hurdle to overcome is learning to "think in German" (or whatever language). The problem is not so much one of relating the new language to the old, but of relating the new language *immediately* to one's apprehension of reality.

The point is that a change in the system of measurement is revolutionary: it must be disruptive; it must to some extent divorce us from reality. I know that my car will not start at -25°F; how it will behave at -25°C I cannot predict—at least, not until I calculate that -25°C = -13°F. The figure -25° ("twenty-five below") has for as long as I can recall meant very specific things to me; it no longer does. All my memories of it are now invalidated. How important this is is difficult to estimate: it is, however, more important than the propagandists for "a more efficient system" generally admit.

## Inflation

One important practical effect of metrication will, undoubtedly, be the masking of inflation. Again, as a

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## The Way the Money Goes

This continuation of a review begun last month of a book by H. Heclo and A. Wildavsky entitled, *The Private Government of Public Money*, describes some of the most important characteristics and implications of a typical modern public expenditure system.

### The Situation in Summary

We can summarize the authors' findings regarding the prominent characteristics of the British public expenditure system (which they view as in some respects a model for others) as follows:

(1) Its operations are, for all practical purposes, beyond the purview of Parliament.

(2) Its decision-making *as regards policy* is highly centralized and shifting increasingly into the hands of civil servants whose actions are regularly conditioned by such considerations as maintaining the favour of those with whom they work—to the exclusion of the general interests of the members of society.

(3) Its policies tend to become entrenched and resistant to any kind of innovation, both because of their enormous scope and the departmental rule of thumb that every opportunity for rapacity should be exploited to the maximum possible extent: "every political administrator knows that there is almost no limit to the sum of money which might be spent for any one of the great purposes of government"(346) [and for less "great" purposes, as well].

(4) Its growth has been accompanied by accretions of new bodies whose functions are unclear, whose methods are questionable, and which enjoy freedom from any effective accountability.

(5) Its ultimate controllers seem to be screened not only from public view but even from the view of high officials:—

According to another undersecretary, the one area 'where things cannot be settled among ourselves is usually in the area of finance, where we have to send things up to the Treasury hierarchy to deal with the Bank of England.' The heads of the supply divisions refer to the 'somewhat mysterious' dealings with the Treasury and the Bank of England(73).

The descriptive terminology the authors use is less direct than the foregoing, perhaps; but it amounts to the same thing. Obviously, the features of the British system are not confined to that country.

### The View from Below

Reduced thus to its fundamentals, the situation is susceptible to much criticism. However, after having laid all the necessary groundwork, the authors fail in its elaboration. They seem not to see their task in terms of questioning the basic assumptions of the public expenditure system. Rather—after offering some tentative suggestions for tidying it up, they conclude their study in full-scale retreat from the issues they have raised: "No one knows the answers"(389).

This is the great weakness and disappointment of the book. The authors contend that, standing outside the system, they have arrived at a truer understanding of its nature than its actual administrators. Yet—even without the conventional bureaucratic blinkers — their perspective is neither so broad nor so balanced as they would have us believe. For example, it completely omits from consideration one element essential to the whole apparatus—namely, the taxpayer supporting it.

Presumably, this implies that Heclo and Wildavsky feel that the existing relationship between the members of the public and the public expenditure system is perfectly normal. A number of administrative bugs persist but the condition the system has brought us to is not in itself to be questioned. The authors 'observe' the effects of the Keynesian 'revolution'; they do not contest their desirability. The continual expansion of government and its control over the economy and the citizenry are treated as part of the natural order of things. That public administration should swallow more and more of the assets of the country is apparently unexceptionable. Nor is any doubt cast on the proposition that patterns of conduct prescribed by bureaucrats for the sake of administrative convenience constitute the best patterns for the individual in society.

### The Way Out

Thus, while we may applaud the authors' efforts to debunk some of the romantic conceptions associated with

the management of monies in public coffers, finding the way out of the mess is left to us. Let us take as our point of departure the significant observation that it is mere sentimentalism to suppose that control over the purse-strings can be divorced from determination of the course that government will follow. "There is considerable nonsense in the notion that the Treasury's concern can and/or should lie only in financial questions, not substantive policy"(348); "Politicians may dispute, but experienced officials know that expenditure is policy; policy is expenditure"(345). In other words, control over money is control over power to command results.

The necessity, therefore, is to diminish government control over the financial resources of the nation and reduce government activities to dimensions subject to human scrutiny and comprehension. Formidable as the task may appear, we must either face up to it or see the productive segments of society succumb to the cancer now living upon them. A culture cannot tolerate forever the dissipation of its creative energies. Already the attitude is widespread, if not prevalent, that fidelity and excellence in performance are foolish objectives; and sabotage and blackmail are almost everywhere regarded as quick, acceptable ways to 'success'.

It would be unfair exclusively to blame a system for producing this state of affairs. If men were not corruptible, they would not become corrupted. Nevertheless, the cumulative effects of living for extended periods in a perverted environment can be devastating—especially on a population habituated to moral passivity.

As is frequently the case, a correct postulation of the problem immediately suggests the solution. The answer to ramifying bureaucratic dictatorship resides in a proposal that has previously appeared in these pages. If we want to establish an environment conducive to the development of self-conscious and self-disciplined persons (rather than the broken-spirited robots congenial to the present regime) we must begin an unconditional transfer of financial power from the interests, both public and private, which have appropriated the greater part of it to the individual. Movement in this direction must be a vital component of any attempt at social regeneration.

R.E.K.

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result of years of experience of associating measures with prices, we have learned what things should cost: from this experience, we are able to recognize that prices are rising outrageously. The metric system will effectually ensure that we will not be able to reckon (very specifically, at least) the degree to which we are being diddled. Comparison depends upon likeness; metrication will initially annihilate the basis of comparison. You cannot add plums and panthers; nor can you add, subtract, multiply, or divide pounds and kilograms. Before you can, you must make them similar. Another step is interposed between reality and the means by which we communicate to each other about reality. The person who does not know—from experience of how many pies one can make from it, how many people he can feed with it, how many of it he weighed when he was at school—what a kilogram is will not know how much he should pay for it.

### Cultural Discontinuity

Another aspect of this question—in addition to the assault upon the personal, experiential memory of persons—is the alienation of future generations from the cultural memory as it is preserved, for example, in literature. Any books written before metrication will have to be annotated for posterity. Otherwise, a person reading that the temperature was 80° will assume that the story is taking place in a blast furnace. Once more, literature derives its effectiveness from the immediacy of its means of communication, language, to the experience of the reader. Anyone who has encountered literature written even a century ago realizes the persistent frustration associated with the question, "What did that word mean then?" Not denotatively, but connotatively. Or, try to figure out a date on the Julian calendar. Or, try to make a poem whose basic metaphor involves medieval cosmology comprehensible to a student in the late twentieth century. "How would an Elizabethan have responded to that phrase? What *experience* did Shakespeare want to communicate?" We do not know—in spite of the lucubrations of those whose intellectual portmanteau contains an oversized historical imagination.

This is not to say that we should have clung to the Julian calendar, or to Ptolemaic cosmology. Concepts

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most debased form possible is furnished by the federal election expenses legislation which came into force last August. The new law provides for substantial income-tax rebates on contributions to qualified political parties: on donations up to \$1,150 the government will refund from 75 to 44 percent. Being acceptable in the form of either money or goods and services and deductible from tax payable rather than from taxable income, donations to parties are treated more favourably than those accorded charitable organizations.

A serious criticism can be lodged against this legislation in that, since political parties are not taxed and can inflate their accounts of income and expenditure without penalty, it opens the way to all sorts of financial chicanery.

Even more objectionable, however, is the fact that large sums of money which have been extracted from taxpayers under legal compulsion will henceforth be turned over to organizations to whose purposes these taxpayers may be either indifferent or hostile. The citizen's power to support (or withhold support from) any particular party has been undermined. To indicate the gravity of this situation one need only point out that both the Communist Party of Canada and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada, which participated with unwonted overt vigour in the past federal election campaign in order to qualify as parties under the new law, will now be heavily subsidized by the government to subvert our institutions and work to install a dictatorship in our country. The taxpayer might not approve, but he will pay anyway.

It is strange to contrast the politicians' reaction to this state of affairs with the comparable one involving compulsory check-offs of union dues from the earnings of all employees, whether or not they are actually union members. Many Members of Parliament readily denounced this iniquitous practice and pointed out the immorality of the unions' using such funds to promote political objectives opposed by the involuntary contributors. The election expenses legislation has exactly the same implications, but not a word of protest issues from party quarters. That (when the benefits accrue to themselves) the politicians' reverberating appeals to principle thus fade away tells much about the superfi-

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## To Those Who Share Our Concern

The publication of SEED is an enterprise which we feel is of cardinal importance to the revitalization of our culture. This endeavour represents the concern of a few individuals sensible of their responsibility to reverse, where possible, what they perceive to be the deterioration of the ideological and practical bases of this culture, and prepared to make personal sacrifices in the accomplishment of this objective.

However, our success can only be in proportion to our resources, which — particularly in their financial aspect — are quite limited. We are determined to proceed, even within those limitations. But we would like to do more.

Therefore, if you respond to the challenge that SEED has set for itself and would like to contribute to our venture, we invite your donations.

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ciality, if not utter falseness, of their sentiments.

In fact, the only comment they have offered has consisted of panegyrics of an impending 'revitalization of democracy'. They argue that more persons will be prepared to contribute to political parties in future — and that politics will be brought closer to the population. No doubt more will contribute: it is easy to be generous with other people's money.

The new election expenses legislation is merely another manifestation of the lunatic notion that the institutions of democracy can somehow be strengthened by sapping the virtues essential to its operation—namely, personal initiative and direct responsibility for its consequences.

. . . fundamentally Hegel makes men into heathens, into a race of animals gifted with reason. For in the animal world "the individual" is always less important than the race. But it is the peculiarity of the human race that just because the individual is created in the image of God "the individual" is above the race. This can be wrongly understood and terribly misused: *conceda*. But that is Christianity. And *that* is where the battle must be fought.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*

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change; words change: this is inevitable, often desirable. But it *does* cut us off from the experience of those who preceded us; it does make the truths they were trying to express in some degree inaccessible to us. If those truths are important, they ought to be preserved; revolutionary changes in language are inimical to their preservation in a meaningful form. I am not arguing that change should be resisted. But we should be aware of the cultural implications of calculated, deliberate (as opposed to organic or evolutionary) change.

Again, the problem is one of the maintenance of bases for comparison. The more difficult that comparison becomes, the less effective will be anything but the immediate here and now. "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past," runs the party slogan in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (31). It is arguable that the literature of the past portrays 'values' that are no longer popular today; to the extent that that literature is rendered obscure, the cultural effect of those values will be modified. Those who currently purvey propaganda for their particular point of view will not have to concern themselves about competition from 'obsolete' utterances containing 'obsolete' values. Consciously or unconsciously, someone is fostering policies which must alienate us from our cultural heritage.

Metrication, in effect, is one of those policies. It may, in fact, be relatively insignificant; nevertheless, it is more than a matter of mere "convenience". And, if it is only a bureaucratic "game", it is a game with serious implications.

D.R.K.

<sup>1</sup>Penguin Modern Classics, 73.

<sup>2</sup>Anyone who regards this as an "alarmist" statement (or insinuation) is referred to Arnold Toynbee's prediction last year in the *Observer* that large-scale rationing (among other things) is imminent. See "Gathering from Thistles", *Seed*, I:5 (June, 1974).

"Justice, the Law of Shylock, is the perfect demonstration of the unsuitability of the legal process to anything but a purely static condition. In order to make the world suitable for the Reign of Law, the relationship of every individual to the Law must be similar, which, in the last resort, means that all individuals must be similar. Laws are made by people with the Card-index mind."

C.H. Douglas

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