

# The SOCIAL CREDITER

For Economic Democracy

Quarterly Volume 81 No 7 Winter 2003

## Editorial

*If it had been the purpose of human activity on earth to bring the planet to the edge of ruin, no more efficient mechanism could have been invented than the market economy,* observed Jeremy Seabrook recently. The idea that the economy-as-we-know-it did not evolve in order to provide us with the necessities of life is a very difficult concept to grasp.

Nevertheless, it is historically evident that the money economy is founded upon denial of access to the wherewithall for self provisioning. As Derrick Jensen documents, people become dependent upon a money income when they have lost their rights of access to the means of production (see Jensen's compelling work, reviewed in this issue of TSC).

Ultimately, the means of production, all the resources of society, its land, machinery, knowledge and ability to labour, have been handed down from generation to generation, and remain the property of society as a whole. Today, however, what is produced with those resources, and how the product is distributed, is determined by the money system. We are all economic agents in that system. Yet we rest content in our ignorance of how the system works, as if it were none of our responsibility. It is far easier to live within the 'culture of make-believe', allowing Mother Market to supply all our needs, no matter what the damage to the

ecosystem, or the devastating impact upon the lives of the untold numbers of the dispossessed, whose land and labour is taken to feed our consumer society. The breakdown of global capitalism, as predicted in *Asses in Clover*, is the logical outcome of our continued failure to think and act responsibly.

Global corporate culture, 'the culture of make believe' is destroying the world. It is destroying the oceans, the forests, the wetlands, the rivers, other species, indigenous people and all who seek justice from the current order. It silences and destroys all who wish to change the current social order, the anti-globalisation, anti-WTO and anti-war protestors, those who seek justice, peace and an end to mass poverty. Moreover, it ensures that people collude in their own oppression and that of others, by doing what is expected of them in their paid jobs without asking fundamental questions. It allows people to latch onto labels such as 'trouble-maker' or 'crank' with decided relief, if what was being said seemed, at first glance, to make sense. For decent, law-abiding citizens going about their rightful business, such people can be safely ignored, thank goodness. Labelling can also be used to set one group of would-be rebels against another, with the resultant confusion leaving orthodoxy (seemingly) on the high moral ground.

Where they are taught at all in educational establishments, alternative socio-political ideas are

presented as historical or sociological curiosities, making it difficult for alternatives to be given serious consideration. From the outset, when Douglas' embarked on setting out alternatives to mainstream economics, he and his followers have been labelled every name under the sun, including 'socialist', 'Marxist', 'fascist', 'anti-Semitic', 'right-wing', 'left-wing', 'crank', 'heretical', 'heterodox', 'sociological' and even 'spiritual'. Intended to discredit, such labelling has been powerfully effective. The main part of this issue of TSC is, therefore, devoted to an exploration of the terminology used in such labelling, with an introduction to guild socialism and distributism.

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chapters of *Asses in Clover*.... (an

excellent Christmas present?)

## An Essay on Red Herrings

In argument or debate, a red herring is used to divert the attention of the potential thinker from following the inherent logic of the case being presented. It is used when the proponent of a weak case in logic sees a powerful argument for a change of heart being given a serious hearing. On the whole, red herrings are drawn across the path by defenders of the status quo. Hence a person arguing the case for peace, social justice or ecological sustainability will often be attacked by attaching to them an unsavoury label (extreme right, or left, fascist, communist etc) or attributing to them a remark or action which 'proves' they have fallen foul of standards of public decency. Over recent decades, this has been enough to divert attention from the work of virtually all thinkers who raise serious questions about the nature of 'progress'

### Key words

Key trigger words are very useful as an excuse for switching off from a debate. However, to say 'I am/I am not a socialist, capitalist, communist, nationalist, feminist, academic, right-winger, left-winger, Marxist, Christian, fascist, atheist, economist (orthodox or heterodox) anti-Semite, even social creditor, is not particularly illuminating in defining one's own views. It is of even less value in creating a meaningful debate about options for the future. Following a party line or a leader or guru of any kind requires constant intellectual vigilance, since the most gentle teachings can be corrupted to the service of evil, as e.g. the corruption of Christianity in the Crusades, Inquisition and Nazi Germany.

**Capitalism** is an economic system in which the land, factories, machinery and transport, are owned by private

individuals or corporations. All the material resources necessary to produce food, clothing, housing, fuel, furnishing and so on for the community are the personal property of a group or class of people, who decide what should be produced on the grounds of financial advantage to themselves. Under capitalism, the vast majority of people are utterly dependent upon working for a money wage or salary to obtain the means of subsistence for themselves and their families. Although working for others has been around for millennia, total dependence upon the money system from birth to death is a very recent phenomenon. The capitalist 'free market' arose through a State legal system which guaranteed money interests over and above the common rights of ordinary people to obtain their livelihoods from agricultural, commons and 'waste' forests, streams and rivers. Capitalism is underpinned by a legal system of State interference, in the form of subsidies, joint stock companies and limited liability companies, all of which work to the advantage of the property-owning sections of the population.

**Feudalism** is often misrepresented as an exploitative system similar to slavery. However, examination of the system of land rights under feudalism reveals that the overlord does not own the agricultural land and surrounding forests and wastes in any sense comparable to private ownership as understood under capitalism. Ultimately, the land belongs to God and the people. 'Keep out! Private Property' signs are not on the social agenda. The rights of access to the means of production, i.e. access to the land and knowledge of the use of natural resources, was a normal human right which was not subjected to the intervention of the institutions of finance.

**Socialism.** The term 'socialism' can be applied to a vast array of very different economic and political belief systems. Roughly speaking, a 'socialist' is a person who believes that the means of production (land and capital, including intellectual property) should not be privately owned and operated for personal financial gain. Unfortunately, the negation of capitalism by socialists is rarely found in association with rational proposals for practical alternatives. Socialists fall into two broad camps. Marxists regard the revolutionary collapse of capitalism as inevitable, while social democrats envisage that the gradual reform of capitalism will lead to a socialist society. When pressed to describe how a socialist economy would operate, however, socialists tend to change the subject. The use of the terms 'capitalism' and 'socialism' can be traced to Marx's monumental analysis of the capitalist system.

### Labourism

Central to both economic theory (orthodoxy) and the practice of capitalism is the wages system. Any form of 'socialism' which envisages the continuation of the wages/salary system in any shape or form is more correctly termed 'labourism'. Labourism can seek better pay and conditions for certain categories of workers – nurses, firemen and so on – but the employing body holds all the cards. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the crucial distinction between labourism and socialism has been blurred and obscured. The Labour Party – New and Old – is correctly named. It is the party of labour, or the employed 'worker', and not of socialism. It seeks 'full employment' under the wages system. It does not seek a sane economy based on responsibility for the land and community.

**Guild socialism.** The Guild Socialists

stressed the centrality of production as service, seeking to divorce the payment of a money income from the process of giving service in production. They were the first to promote the not-for-financial-profit concept of work for the common good, by looking back to the medieval guilds and farming practices which pre-dated the industrial revolution. The serious study of guild socialism, and its offspring, social credit, has been studiously ignored by all but a very narrow band of historical specialists. Workers seeking higher wages have united their interests with those of the capitalists. They seek financial gain for themselves, justifying, for example, the production of armaments for exports because it creates employment. Educationalists, feminists, service and health workers have struggled for a 'fairer' allocation of the proceeds of capitalism. Meanwhile, guild socialism has been attacked on all fronts as 'impractical', 'idealistic' and/or dangerous nonsense. The red herring of 'where's the money to come from' has sent all and sundry scurrying after capitalism's ill-gotten gains. Virtually all other principles have been subordinated to money values.

In short, the major distinction between labourism and guild socialism is the basic motivation of the actors. Labourists seek better conditions for the downtrodden workers, creating and sustaining an 'us-versus-them' approach to social issues, in which greed and envy are central. Emulation of the material lifestyle of the employing (capitalist, bourgeois) class drives workers, through their trade union representatives, to seek larger rewards from the system. Hence the suggestion that the system be changed to create justice, peace and an ecologically sane and sustainable economy is greeted with the same degree of incomprehension by

labourists and capitalists alike. (See article on Guild Socialism and Distributism in this issue of TSC).

**Distributism.** The object of Distributism is to distribute access to economic resources throughout the population, as a basic right of humanity. Before the enclosures, which caused the migrations of landless peasants and created the pool of forced labour necessary for the industrial revolution, the rights of the masses to secure their own livelihoods from the land could be taken for granted. Through the reality of the small farmer and the craft guild, the personal ownership of the means of production was the accepted fact of economic life. Until this point in history, it could be taken for granted that even migrant labourers had families with land, to which they might return. Like guild socialists, distributists saw the dead hand of centralised bureaucracy, backed by the force of law, as incompatible with genuine economic and political freedom. (See the article on Guild Socialism and Distributism).

**Communism** arose through the writings of Karl Marx. For Marx, the emergence of the propertied class (bourgeoisie) to create capitalism followed from the overthrow of the landed aristocracy. Capitalism was a Good Thing in that it did away with the old, laborious methods of production and the myth-riddled religious superstitions which stultified progressive ideas. However, the down side was that capitalism preyed upon the downtrodden working class. Hence progress would come through open conflict between the two classes, the oppressed and the oppressors. The propertied class would be destroyed, rendering the whole of society equally property-less and therefore reduced to a shared common interest. That was the theory. It is no good turning to Marx, or to any proponent of communism for guidance on exactly what form the

new egalitarian society would take. The experience of communism in the former Soviet Union or Communist China offers little guidance on how economic oppression might be eliminated by communism.

**Marxism** exists as a pure creation of academia, and is the supreme red herring. Amazingly, the nonsense described above (Communism) has been pedalled by zealous academics calling themselves 'Marxists', for well over a century. A careful reading of Marx's original work, which has not been done by many an academic so-called 'Marxist', leaves no doubt that his was a monumental study of the origins and philosophy of capitalism. However, to describe Marx's work as socialist is to stretch the meaning of the term beyond the bounds of credulity. Marx took issue with the rapacious control over land, labour and the physical and intellectual tools and processes which belong by rights to all. However, as Thorstein Veblen (author of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*) pointed out, Marx promoted the philosophy of greed, envy and self-interest, albeit on behalf of the alienated working class by targeting their masters.

### **Feminism**

The 'them-versus-us', 'if you aren't for us you are against us' polarising fallacy is nowhere more in evidence than in 'feminism'. Feminism originates in the same (non-) intellectual area as Marxism, in its polarisation into 'classes'. Feminism is based on the assumption that 'women' can be discussed as a 'class' or category which sets them apart from all others in society, i.e. 'men'. I have spent many an (un)happy hour trying to figure out whence feminism came and where it went. The first international conference of academics I attended was a symposium of feminist economists, held in Amsterdam and attended almost exclusively by women academics

from universities all over the world. I listened to the discussions, trying to seek out some common ground of understanding, but listened in vain. My main concern with feminism is its failure in logic. If women are discriminated against within a society constructed largely by men acting within male (exploitative and destructive) roles, the logic of enabling women to act 'as if' they were men by being allowed to operate within the same male roles is, surely, as escapable as is the case for class-based 'socialism'. Like 'socialism', feminism resents the power over resources held by the other class, but the resentment is based upon self-interest. Of course, like any pretender to the throne, the feminist may argue that she is championing justice, and that given the 'right', she and her companions will bring fairness and enlightenment to the public arena. However, there is no logical reason to suppose that her rule would be any less self-interested than that of past rulers or classes.

### **Anti-Semitism**

To recapitulate, the term 'red herring' originates in hunting. If the hounds are intent upon pursuing a particular path and the master of the hounds wishes to divert them from that path, he draws a red herring across the 'wrong' path. The powerful smell serves to divert the hounds onto the track chosen by the master. Accusations of 'anti-Semitism' have been used systematically to discredit questioning of the economic status quo. By taking a sentence or phrase out of context, unsubstantiated labelling or the identification of a known rogue with sympathy for the cause, a 'bad smell' can be attached to proponents of any alternative analysis of the political economy of industrial capitalism. In this way, innocent explorers of alternatives can be swiftly brought back to the straight and narrow path of political and economic orthodoxy. Throughout the

20<sup>th</sup> century anti-Semitism has been a most effective red herring for keeping serious thought about alternatives down to a minimum.

**Orthodoxy** argues that western democracy and the free market economy may not be perfect, but that no other system maximizes the greatest good of the greatest number. No matter that hundreds of millions go without adequate food or clean drinking water every day, or that 90% of the victims in modern warfare are civilians, i.e. families with children. Orthodoxy uses the red herring of anti-Semitism to prevent you, the reader, from considering the alternatives as proposed by X, Y or Z because as your eyes fall upon their words you will be contaminated, drawn despite yourself into persecution of the Jews, and your good reputation will be tarnished for ever. No, I am not making it up. That is exactly what has happened time and time again when people have begun to investigate serious alternatives to 'I'm all right, Jack-ism'.

### **'I'm all right, Jack-ism'**

What are the alternatives? Are there any? That is very, very difficult to say because the very fact that we can be asking that question means that we – the writer and the reader - have sold ourselves into the system. We are members of the exploiting class. Our every need, including our food, clothes and fuels are brought to us because we have money. The entire system relies on greed as motivation. 'I can buy this with my money', but also 'If I undertake this work for the system I will be given £x financial reward so long as I do not raise fundamental questions, which would mean ignoring the red herrings and entering into a meaningful debate about alternatives.' I might find myself asking whether my lifestyle is a causal factor in the devastating exploitation of the earth and its

people. So I thank my lucky stars that I haven't got time to consider the matter right now. Perhaps when I retire?

### **Fascism**

Fascism provides another very useful red herring when the sense of responsibility for a particular locality or country is invoked. The term is relatively new, being first used to describe Mussolini's style of government in Italy in 1922. It was subsequently applied to Hitler's rule in Germany. The term 'fascism' can be applied to any ideology or movement which appears 'right wing', i.e. hierarchical and authoritarian in structure, or 'nationalistic'. Hence greens and environmentalists campaigning for indigenous farming and respect for the land have had the red herring of 'fascism' drawn across their path. Furthermore, it has seriously been suggested that, as Hitler was a vegetarian, all vegetarians have fascist tendencies.

### **Religion**

At one time, being brought up 'in the faith' meant that as a child you were taught a set of ideas about 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour, backed by stories about 'goodies' and 'baddies' consistent with the set of beliefs common to the community in which you lived. For most in the 'developed' world, faith meant belief in a Supreme Being, the God of Christianity (split into Catholicism and Protestantism), Judaism or Islam. It has become fashionable to deny the old faiths on the grounds that notions of 'right' and 'wrong' were at once restrictive on individual freedom, repressive and wrong. The standards of the piggy bank and the bank account have replaced the standards incorporated in religious texts, and have become a new religion. The tooth fairy puts money under the pillow, while the aim of education is

employment so that money obligations can be met (what are you going to do when you grow up? means how will you earn money?).

While traditional religious institutions are attacked and denigrated, people of good will scurry around, vainly attempting to ameliorate the problems caused by the secularisation of society. Third world debt, consumer debt, mortgage debt, 'red lining' of whole areas of cities, drug trafficking, alcoholism, prostitution, the gun culture, environmental desecration, not to mention the increased scale of poverty (70 million dead of starvation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the killing of civilians in warfare (200,000 by one atomic bomb alone at Hiroshima) make the abuses of traditional religious pale into insignificance. In the culture of make-believe, religions cause wars, secularism causes peace and money is the benign herald of the good society so long as citizens dedicate their lives to earning and spending.

### Conclusion

The culture of make-believe, aka the culture of greed and contentment, allows the comfortable to place the ills of the world on 'them'. We are warm-hearted, right-thinking supporters of a system which is basically just and sustainable. There are one or two wrinkles. Hence we donate money to, or campaign for, those causes we consider most worthy, familiar, just and satisfying. On the whole, however, the world is as it should be. Third world peoples are in a pickle because they are backward, but they'll soon catch up. The inner city poor are feckless, but after all, the poor will always be with us. If the environment is endangered, the politicians will sort it out. After all, what do we elect them for?

In the culture of make believe, the red herring is very welcome. It

makes business-as-usual appear normal and natural, and plays on fear of the unknown. Douglas social credit has been variously attacked as being for and against virtually every one of the categories of labels listed above. It has been attacked as being right-wing, left-wing, capitalist, not capitalist, socialist, not socialist (in the sense of not 'labourist'), pro-feudalism (anti-technology), anti-feudalism (pro-technology), communist, anti-communist, and so on. As far as I know, Douglas social credit has not been accused of being 'pro-Semitic' or 'anti-fascist'. Presumably, there is no mileage in using these labels as terms of abuse, that is, as red herrings. The challenge is to discover the motives behind the attacks. If the motive is to produce a saner and more sensible society than that envisaged from a social credit perspective, it would be considerably more helpful for attackers to spell out those alternatives. That way, a reasoned debate might be generated. Perhaps?

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### Extract from Spiritual Writings

Dorothy L Sayers

It was left for the present age to endow Covetousness with glamour on a big scale, and to give it a title which it could carry like a flag. It occurred to somebody to call it Enterprise. From the moment of that happy inspiration, Covetousness has gone forward and never looked back. It has become a swaggering, swash-buckling, piratical sin, going about with its hat cocked over its eye, and with pistols tucked into the tops of its jack-boots. Its war-cries are 'Business Efficiency!' 'Free Competition!' 'Get Out or Get Under!' and 'There's always Room at the Top!' It no longer screws and saves - it launches out into new enterprises; it gambles and speculates; it thinks in a big way; it takes risks. It can no longer be troubled to deal in real wealth, and so remain attached to

work and the soil. It has set money free from all such hampering ties; it has interests in every continent; it is impossible to pin it down to any one place or any concrete commodity - it is an adventurer, a roving, rollicking free-lance. It looks so jolly and jovial, and has such a twinkle in its cunning eye, that nobody can believe that its heart is as cold and calculating as ever. Besides, where is its heart? Covetousness is not incarnated in individual people, but in business corporations, joint-stock companies, amalgamations, trusts, which have neither bodies to be kicked, nor souls to be damned - nor hearts to be appealed to, either. It is very difficult to fasten on anybody the responsibility for the things that are done with money. Of course, if Covetousness miscalculates and some big financier comes crashing down, bringing all the small speculators down with him, we wag self-righteous heads, and feel that we see clearly where the fault lies. But we do not punish the fraudulent business-man for his frauds, but for his failure.

The Church says Covetousness is a deadly sin - but does she really think so? Is she ready to found Welfare Societies to deal with financial immorality as she does with sexual immorality? Do the officials stationed at church doors in Italy to exclude women with bare arms turn anybody away on the grounds that they are too well-dressed to be honest? Do the vigilance committees who complain of 'suggestive' books and plays make any attempt to suppress the literature which 'suggests' that getting on in the world is the chief object in life? Is Dives, like Magdalen, ever refused the sacraments on the grounds that he, like her, is an 'open and notorious evil-liver'? Does the church arrange services with bright congregational singing, for Total Abstiners from Usury?

(continued on page 80)



## Revolutionary Alternative: Social Credit in Context

Frances Hutchinson

For every difficult and complicated question there is an answer which is simple, easy to understand – and wrong! Unfortunately, of recent decades, Social Credit has all too often been presented as a quick monetary fix to settle the ills of debt-based commercial society. It is nothing of the sort. From its inception in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Social Credit has been firmly embedded in an alternative philosophy in which money becomes the tool rather than the dictator of policy. In effect, Social Credit is the money reform ‘wing’ of Guild Socialism, the quest for good work founded on notions of service to the community. Distributism forms the other vital wing of Guild Socialism, ensuring that the ownership of, and therefore responsibility for the care of, the land and other means of production are as widely dispersed as possible.

### Enclosures

Guild Socialism approaches economics from a historical perspective, locating the enclosure movement as the overriding source of dependence upon the money system for the everyday necessities of life (‘wage-slavery’). ‘Progress’ to industrialism and economism (the political belief that economics is the main factor in society) did not happen ‘naturally’, in a deterministic way. The power of money overcame customary rights of access to farmland, commons, woodlands and waste, from which food was produced and gathered, medicines obtained, clothes, furnishings, housing and fuels created and connections made with the living world of nature upon which all human life ultimately depends. As money destroys traditional rights to benefit from the land, it also destroys traditional responsibilities to care for the long term fertility of the land. The power of money to put humanity and nature asunder has been endorsed by a

legal framework backed by the force of the state, not only in the ‘developed’ world, but wherever colonialism has come between the people and their land.

The title to property in land, mines, forests and factories which underpins the commercialised economy within which ‘the north’ currently operates, was created by a legal system and endorsed by the state. The state recognised, and recognises, combinations, trusts and corporations as legal entities, while protecting the financially rich and powerful with limited liability and a system of subsidies which favour the large unit and so on. From the time of English enclosures to the present day, where farmers are forced off the land they form a vast army of cheap labour for industrialists and profiteers. For Guild Socialists, respect for the land requires that it should be tended by a large number of small landowners. The term ‘peasant’ means an independent farmer, and, in most countries, is a term of respect.(yeoman?).

### Slavery

Slavery flows from the removal of people from their land. A slave is a person who is legally owned by another. Having no freedom of action or right to property, the slave is forced to work for another against his or her will. Slavery is commonly associated with past civilizations, where individuals were forcibly removed from their homelands (where they had land tenure rights) and forced to work in the fields and homes of the dominant elite. Where used on a large scale, as in the Southern States of the USA, slavery can be very expensive. Once the original source of new slaves taken directly from the land ceases to be available, as with the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slaves

must be bought, housed, fed and provided with minimal care, if the ‘stock’ of slaves is to be maintained. By contrast, industrial wage slavery allows the owners of the ‘factors of production’, owners of the land, factories, machines, technologies and facilities for transmitting skills, to force the landless dispossessed to compete for a money wage. It is not necessary for the money wage to be enough to cover costs of subsistence – of food, housing, clothing, education, health care and so on – for the workers and their families. Where large numbers of such workers and their families exist, as in the industrial towns of the ‘north’ in the early industrial revolution, and in the shanty towns of the ‘south’ today, conditions become truly appalling. As commercial employers force down wages and conditions, workers have no option but to accept starvation wages or starve.

### Wage and Salary Slavery

The condition of wage or salary slavery is endorsed by mainstream economic theory which takes the existing distribution of the means of production (property) as read. In theory, owners of labour are free to negotiate with owners of land and owners of factories in such a way that their contribution to the productive process will be fairly rewarded. Where owners of labour have some land tenure rights, and own some tools or technology such that they can provide basic necessities for themselves and their families, the theory might hold good. Although money wages offer the illusion of freedom, total dependence upon a money wage or salary can be viewed as a form of slavery. Dependence on a money income for survival means that the individual and their family are enslaved – to wage/salary slavery. They must accept the terms upon which the wage or salary is offered,

must produce goods and services under orders and must forego ownership of the product produced in their employer's time. No matter how high the money salary might be, employee and family are trapped into dependency as all-embracing as that of the traditional slave. They may own magnificent houses, cars, consumer durables, enjoy fabulous holidays and so on. But if they do not own the means of production (property) such that they can provide for their own basic everyday subsistence needs, they are not truly free. Employees may be consulted, encouraged to offer their opinions, insights and skills, but in the last analysis the money income may be withdrawn by the employing body at any time. No matter how worthwhile the product or service on offer, if the employment ceases to be financially viable, employment ceases. Pensioners have only so much financial security as the system affords.

### Small Scale Ownership

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Guild Socialist thinkers like A.R. Orage, G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Arthur Penty and many others recognised that Communism, nationalisation, or any other form of state ownership of all the means of production would simply consolidate the condition of wage-dependent slavery for all. They therefore explored alternatives in considerable detail. The Social Credit wing eventually tended towards a National Dividend (money income for all), while the Distributists tended towards 'three acres and a cow'. Both, however, recognised that the greatest danger lay in the imposition of uniformity. Hence the general 'guild socialist' approach is one of freedom, variety and choice so long as the scale is small. The rights of small owner-producers always need to be established and guaranteed in law. Where the option to be independent

exists, it gives rise to a saner socio-economic system. Multiple portfolios of income sources, guaranteed in law, enable people to draw income from many sources, and hence offer secure material and intellectual independence for each individual citizen.

### Income Security

As it evolves, the money system creates a situation where people have no choice but to act as producers and consumers according to rules created by the institutions of the money system. Although minor reforms can occur from time to time, the general trend is towards ever-increasing centralisation leading to ecological degradation and social exploitation as financial profitability dominates all other considerations. Powerful interests and individuals will continue to hold sway over the land and its peoples unless and until alternative locally created and controlled institutions replace the centralised bureaucracy that is finance capitalism and its logical offspring, centralised state Communism. A return to a non-monetised economy is highly improbable. Hence proposals for the re-uniting of producers' and consumers' interests in some form of small, locally based 'guild' structure, such as those set out in the Draft Mining Scheme (See, e.g. *The Politics of Money* pages 130-4, *What Everybody Really Wants to Know About Money*, pages 43-49). Such co-operative, financially independent 'guilds', operating their own banks, could apply to all manner of work and service currently undertaken by big business. With many small proprietors and professional service providers, including manufacturing industry, plumbing, medicine, education and farming, a local economy can offer a viable alternative to the juggernaut of globalisation.

### Christmas Reading?

Some enjoyable and thought-provoking suggestions.

So often in today's world, people measure their personal worth by their ability to earn money. Spiritual, ethical and artistic values are tossed aside as the money juggernaut thunders across town and countryside. All that matters is a right relationship with money. Money decides how people spend their time, what they produce and what they consume. The basic necessities of life - food, clothes and furnishings - all are designed through the money system. Social relationships are mediated by money, while the care of the land is determined by the availability of finance. It was not always so.

Publisher Jon Carpenter has reprinted two prophetic books which review the changing relationship between society and finance. *Asses in Clover* provides a highly entertaining spur to constructive thought on the subject of life and money. *The Tree of Life* draws upon the Bible and Shakespeare, while making reference to a host of thinkers from Plato and Aristotle in classical times to Cobbett and Chesterton in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *The Politics of Money* brings up to date the themes expressed in the two earlier books, providing an historical analysis of the role of money in the economy.

The money system is powerful enough to encourage a certain amount of protest, since this makes it look as if change is imminent. That toleration will continue so long as there is little joined-up thought in the expressions of protest. Hence the route towards a genuine and radical reversal of unsustainable 'progress' would appear to be through a host of interconnections. Together, these three books provide a starting point in the quest for an understanding of money and society. (Details of all the books follow overleaf)

**The Tree of Life** by H J Massingham, (originally published 1943, current edition published by Jon Carpenter, 2003, ISBN 1- 897766 - 85 - 8, £13.99)

**Asses in Clover** by Eimar O'Duffy, (originally published in 1933, current edition published by Jon Carpenter, 2003, ISBN 1 - 897766 - 86 - 6, £11.00)

**The Politics of Money: Towards Sustainability and Economic Democracy** by Frances Hutchinson, Mary Mellor and Wendy Olsen, published by Pluto Press, 2002, ISBN 0 - 7453 - 1720 - 0, £16.99

It's about time the used and abused citizen-consumers of this world stood up and told our financial masters and business elites that we have had enough. We want current production distributed to all by issue of adequate effective demand (Consumer Dividends and Compensated Prices) to make this possible—without the need to purchase past production by obtaining current financial income by building bombs. The present defective and perverse financial system makes war an ongoing inevitability. What a future for mankind! We could have next to heaven on earth—but we insist that although production is increasingly due to non-human factors no person (except by degrading "charity" and cost-creating bureaucratic government "welfare") can have anything except by the sweat of his or her brow and body, even if it means destroying civilization. When we act upon a misapprehension of reality we are in error. When we continue to do it regardless of negative results, the reasonable supposition is that we are psychotic.

Wallace Klinck Message to Ekky Irion

**Dorothy L Sayers**

(continued from page 77)

The church's record is not, in these matters, quite as good as it might be. But is perhaps rather better than that of those who denounce her for her neglect. The church is not the Vatican, nor the Metropolitans, nor the Bench of Bishops; it is not even the Vicar or the Curate or the Church-wardens: the church is you and I. And are you and I in the least sincere in our pretence that we disapprove of Covetousness?

**Do We Need Nature?**

Derrick Jensen

**Shell** and *The Economist* are offering \$20,000 for the best answer to the question 'Do we need nature?' Before we answer that question, we need to remember this: the person who controls the questions controls the answers. How different would the answers be if *The Economist* and **Shell** had asked one of the following: 'Does nature need us?' 'Does nature need **Shell**?' 'Do humans need **Shell**?' 'Do nature or humans need oil extraction?' 'What can we each do to best protect nature?' 'Who is the "we" in *The Economist* and **Shell**'s question?'

But here's probably the most important question of all: 'If our answers do not fit with the financial and propaganda interests of **Shell** and *The Economist*, will they still hand us a cheque for \$20,000?'

Just in case we forget who is writing that cheque, the sponsors have provided several other questions to lead us on our (or rather their) way. The first is: 'How much biodiversity is necessary?' The question is insanely arrogant, because it presumes we know better than nature how much biodiversity it needs. If you really want to know how much biodiversity is necessary, don't ask me, or any other human; look to the land. And then wait 100 generations.

But it is **Shell** and *The Economist*'s final question that is the most revealing of all: 'Is the line between "artificial" and "natural" itself artificial?'

We've heard this argument before: humans are natural, therefore everything they create is natural. Chainsaws, nuclear bombs, capitalism, sex slavery, asphalt, cars, polluted streams, a devastated world, devastated psyches... all natural.

I have two responses. The first is

from my book *The Culture of Make Believe*, where I said, "This is, of course, nonsense. We are embedded in the natural world. We evolved as social creatures in this natural world. We require clean water to drink, or we die. We require clean air to breathe, or we die. We require food, or we die. We require love, affection, social contact in order to become our full selves. It is part of our evolutionary legacy as social creatures. Anything that helps us to understand all of this is natural: any ritual, artefact, process, action is natural to the degree that it reinforces our understanding of our embeddedness in the natural world, and any ritual, artefact, process, action is unnatural to the degree that it does not."

My second is: Who cares? I want to live in a world that has wild salmon and tiger salamanders and healthy forests and vibrant human communities where mothers don't have dioxin in their breastmilk. If you want to argue that oil tankers, global warming, DDT, and the rest of the massive deathcamp we call civilisation is natural, you can just go off in a corner with your \$20,000 cheque and your utilitarian-philosopher buddies and play your bullshit linguistic games while the rest of us try to do something about the very real problems caused by people who think and act exactly like you.

A better question might be 'If our answers do not fit with the financial/propaganda interests of **Shell** and *The Economist*, do you think they'll still hand us a cheque for \$20,000?'

Derek Jensen is an activist and author. His most recent book is *The Culture of Make Believe* (See reviews pp 81-83) This article featured in the July/August issue of *The Ecologist* and is reproduced here with permission.



## Dangers are just too Great

Michael Meacher MP

Until last month, I was environment minister in Tony Blair's government involved in formulating policy on GM food. I believe there are four questions my former colleagues must answer positively and satisfactorily - unless they can do so there is no case for licensing the commercial growing of GM crops.

The questions are:

- Is there sufficient certainty about the long-term health and environmental effects of GM food?
- Have there been systematic clinical trials on human beings to test whether eating GM food is safe?
- Can the government guarantee organic and conventional farming will be protected from GM contamination?
- Can the government guarantee that the food we buy in shops, which is not labelled GM, will be wholly GM-free?

At present, the answer to all four questions is 'No'. Most worrying to consumers is the long-term health and environmental effects of GM.

And yet the data is nearly all produced by the biotechnology industry and not checked by other experts; nor is there a requirement to release data showing harmful effects on health. Problems have only come to light when the results have been forcibly made public by lawsuits or when scientists blow the whistle.

Biotech companies claim genetic engineering is a precise technique and merely an extension of traditional breeding methods. This is simply not true.

The process is actually crude, imprecise and brings many new risks.

It involves the random introduction of new genes into a plant which can then transfer into bacteria in our own bodies.

This is denied by the industry - yet when University of Newcastle scientists fed seven people a meal containing GM soya, in three cases the GM material moved out of the food and entered bacteria in the gut.

Yet this alarming finding was dismissed by the government's Food Standards Agency as no risk to health. Ministers and government scientists try to reassure us by saying there is no evidence of any greater risk from a GM product than from its non-GM counterpart. But how can that be so when they haven't carried out systematic tests?

One GM soya, for example, had 27 per cent more allergens (substances that cause an allergic reaction) than non-GM soya.

Three years ago, when U.S. food products were accidentally contaminated with GM Star Link maize more than 50 Americans suffered allergic reactions ranging from abdominal pain, diarrhoea and skin rashes to life-threatening reactions.

In Britain the York Nutritional Laboratory reports a 50 per cent rise in soya allergies since imports of GM soya started.

The claims of the biotech companies need to be treated with scepticism. For example, they say that when GM ingredients are processed into animal feed no trace of genetic modification is left, but a recent study by the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs disproved this.

In some trials, where animals have

been fed GM food, there have been negative effects - though in some cases the food was still approved for humans.

For example, rats fed Flavr Savr tomatoes developed moderate to severe gastritis - though the tomatoes were still sold in America for a while.

Twice as many chickens fed GM forage maize died as those fed non-GM feed - yet the government still approved the maize for commercial growing.

Because the risks can be long-term we can't yet identify all of them, let alone assess them.

Worse, doubters are expected to prove GM products are unsafe, rather than biotech companies being required to prove they are safe.

There is only one sensible response - to defer any decision on the commercial planting of GM crops until all the necessary testing has been carried out.

This article first appeared in the **Daily Mail** on 12 July 2003 and is reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

### Book reviews

#### *The Culture of Make Believe*

**Derrick Jensen**

**Context Books, 2001**

**pp. 590 \$18.00 pbk**

**ISBN: 1 893956 28 8**

(We consider this book to be of such significance that we have taken the unusual step of including two reviews of it in the same issue.Ed.)

*(1) Stop the hate by getting rid of the framing conditions*

It was during the Gulf War that I began to make the connections that would change my life. I could see the government lie to us. I could see the

media deliver the lies. I could see the public believe the lies. I could see the nationalism. I could clearly see we were a violent people and I could see the corporate agenda interwoven between it all. Yet despite these fairly obvious observations, we continue to believe (or want to believe because it is easier to just go along) that our government is honest, that the media is fair, that Americanism is about peace, justice and apple pie.

I've spent the last 12 years as an activist, trying to figure out where to focus my time and energy in order to change things so that my family might live free and peacefully, on a planet that continues to support life. Why is our culture destroying the world? The oceans, the forests, the wetlands, the rivers, other species, indigenous people, colored people, poor people, non-white people (as opposed to white), and anyone who wishes to change the current social order (Cuba, the Taliban, anti-WTO protestors, women, unions, people of color). What the hell is going on here?

Derrick Jensen begins *The Culture of Make-Believe* by asking "How exactly would you define a hate group?" Nazis and the Klu Klux Klan are obvious answers, but what about corporations like Union Carbide? How about the US Senate? Financiers like JP Morgan? And what about the American people who routinely turn away from injustices (or worse, actively participate), because "privileges (or promised privileges, or perceived privileges) can be revoked for improper behavior?"

Jensen uses these questions to weave together a cultural analysis that sometimes left me crying. The answer to a question like this goes much, much deeper than the obvious answers we routinely claim: It's capitalism (never mind that non-capitalist countries destroy the world

with equal impunity, and never mind that anti-capitalist folks routinely participate in the destruction as well). It's corrupt politicians. It's greed. It's an unorganized working class, it's corporate domination, it's corporate media, it's schools, etc. etc.

To be honest, it is all of these, and yet these answers still don't go deep enough. The deeper question of why we participate in this insane, ecocidal, murderous society is the question all of us need to understand and answer. Why did otherwise intelligent Germans (and for that matter, Jews, U.S. corporations and for a long while, the American government) go along with Hitler's insane vision for Germany? What made people willingly walk into a gas chamber? What made people conceive the gas chambers, design the gas chambers, build the gas chambers, and then operate them as if they were cranking out widgets? How do we get up each day and continue to participate in a culture that is surely destroying other people (and the planet, other species etc. as efficiently as the Germans destroyed the Jews (and Russians, Slavs, homosexuals, handicapped etc.)?)

If you dig deep enough, part of the answer is our social arrangement known as civilization and Jensen is clearly anti-civilization. This 10,000 year-old social experiment that "originated in conquest abroad and repression at home" is the source of the hate and destruction according to Jensen. "The hatred that characterizes so much of our system" is not a product of biology. People are not fundamentally hateful. Our hate is not a result of several billion years of natural selection. It is the result of the framing conditions on which we were raised. It is a result of the unquestioned assumptions that inform us. If we want to stop the hate, we need to get rid of the framing conditions. Until we do that, we are bound to fail. "We need to get rid of

civilization....

*Maybe that seems absurd to you. It doesn't to me. It just seems like a lot of work, done by a lot of different people, in a lot of different places in a lot of different ways. But I'll tell you what does seem absurd to me: the possibility of allowing this inhumane system to continue.*

The most powerful system is that which leads people to take hold of their own leashes. That is, a system under which people do what is expected of them without any external control being exerted over them. And, without any perception on their own part that they are being controlled."

*Ishmael* (Daniel Quinn) was the first book that introduced me to the cultural and social arrangements that have us all participating in the world's destruction. I recommend *The Culture of Make Believe* as a book to help one cut through the lies and myths that keep us participating in our own imprisonment and ultimately, our own destruction.

Brian Setzler is a KBOO board member, Green activist and dedicated to saving the world.

This review previously appeared in *The Portland Alliance* (June 2002)

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(2) "*Hatred felt long enough and deeply enough no longer feels like hatred. It feels like economics, or religion, or tradition, or simply the way things are.*" - Derrick Jensen

Imagine that you were offered a chance to examine our society through a special kind of microscope. You could see so clearly that normally invisible structures and patterns would be obvious - you might even discern the future of Western civilization.

But what if the price for that vision was a walk through a historical chamber of horrors, rendered with the same burning clarity? Would you look?

For the bravest of readers, there is Derrick Jensen's newest book, *Culture of Make Believe*. Jensen is a masterly writer who weaves threads as diverse as the Holocaust, lynching, environmental destruction, rape, Colombian death squads and manufacturing disasters into a cohesive picture that, however horrific, make perfect sense - because, according to Jensen, such atrocities are the inevitable fruits of an economic system that values production over life.

We put a price tag on everything. We commodify living beings. Our system rewards the very greed and globalization that will, in Jensen's view, deliver our destruction. Those are wide-ranging assertions - but he weaves the history, the details and the context so naturally that his conclusions ring disturbingly true.

Jensen is a truth teller. He writes with a fierce personal passion and is a genius at making connections between seemingly unrelated events. To read Jensen is indeed life-changing, a phrase used regularly those who've read his previous book, *A Language Older than Words*. Now in its fourth printing, *Language* traces the connection between family violence and the larger violence that permeates our society. Jensen's honesty is wrenching as he uses his personal story of familial abuse as a mirror to reflect the same symptoms in American society.

In *The Culture of Make Believe*, the mirror is larger - to the tune of 700 pages - and the reflection even more devastating as Jensen examines "the precise relationship between our economic system and hate." Leaving childhood stories behind, Jensen turns his considerable intellect to bear on the numerous horrors of our country's recent history. Although extensively researched, the result is far from a dry recounting of events.

*We find ourselves the unquestioning footsoldiers in a dirty war called "progress," "civilization," "development" - everything except what it is: warfare against life itself*

Jensen's special power as a writer is the weaving of fact with the personal details that arrest the heart, even as the mind gropes for explanations.

The book opens with a grisly retelling of the 1918 public murder of Mary Turner, a black woman, in Valdosta, (Ga). Turner's husband was one of 11 black men lynched by a white mob enraged over the killing of a white farmer. Ten of the black men were innocent, including Mary Turner's husband, but that fact was irrelevant to the angry community. When Mary Turner publicly vowed to seek revenge, or at least justice, for her murdered husband, the upstanding citizens of Valdosta - according to an AP report of the time - "took exception to her remarks as well as her attitude" and gruesomely murdered the eight-months-pregnant woman in a public frenzy of gasoline, stab wounds and bullets.

Before letting the reader leave this event, Jensen describes a similar murder, of a young Colombian woman, by a South American death squad last year. Thus begins an in-depth exploration into the workings of hate.

Jensen does not write for shock value or for shame. Yes, he renders grievous scenes - some from our past and many from our present - in disturbing detail. But it's what comes next that matters. Jensen explores where we as ordinary Americans appear in these events. What is our involvement?

The answer is foreshadowed in the quote by Primo Levi which opens the first chapter: "*Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the*

*common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.*"

Jensen asks deeper questions than most dare to do, and the answers are profoundly disturbing. By the end of the book, it's impossible to deny that we sustain the corporate culture of greed that creates such horrors as the 8000 people dead in the Union Carbide disaster in India, slavery, the decimation of Native Americans, poor people battling one another to work in jobs that will kill them, and the ongoing destruction of the very ecosystem which keeps us all alive.

We find ourselves the unquestioning footsoldiers in a dirty war called "progress," "civilization," "development" - everything except what it is: warfare against life itself. *The Culture of Make Believe* reveals that our economic and social systems carry hate at their very core - and require hate in order to function.

Civilization as we have lived it so far, will inevitably yield more of the same in the future - it's the very nature of the beast. How does one recommend, in the strongest possible terms, a book as unsettling as *The Culture of Make Believe*?

Jensen answers in his introduction: "If we wish to stop the atrocities we will need to understand and change the social and economic conditions that cause them. This book is a weapon...it is a knife that cuts through the ropes that bind us to our ways of perceiving and being in the world. It is a match, to light a fuse." We can choose to look away, to make believe the connections Jensen describes don't exist. Or we can take a hard look, take a deep breath, and begin to change our world.

Leigh Wilkerson is a poet and writer who lives in the Black Mountains of WNC. This review was published in the 24 April 2002 issue of the Asheville Mountain Xpress.

Extract from *The Tree of Life* (HJ Massingham)

**Chapter Seven: IV The Sterilization of Nature**

The link between Toynbee on the nemesis of the dispossession of the peasants and Wrench on the nemesis of the exploitation of the soil is Steinbeck's appalling indictment of the Middle West and California latifundia in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The book is as raw and crude as an uncooked lump of beef, and an agonizing one to read: I defy anybody with a grain of sensibility to read more than fifty pages at a sitting. But its facts are undisputed. He describes how the tractors were driven through the farmsteads of the family farmers, how they were forced to sell out all their gear at knock-down prices owing to the banks and trading companies foreclosing on them, and the great trek west in gimrack cars sold to them by salesman bandits. The evicted arrived in California moneyless and half-starved to find that the handbills that had enticed them thither were a calculated trick of the owners of the orchard latifundia to employ pickers who would take anything to save their families from downright starvation. All this is a variation upon what happened to our own ex-peasants, the hangings, the transportations, the starvation, between 1800 and 1850. The Middle West lands thus emptied were speedily farmed out by monoculture, machines and no muck to supply our urban masses with cheap food and cheap raw material for the Lancashire cotton mills. Perhaps the inner meaning of this dreadful book is summed up in these words:

'And this is easy and efficient (tractor cultivation), so easy that the wonder goes out of work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation. And in the tractor-man there grows the contempt that comes only to a stranger who has little understanding and no relation. For nitrates are not the land, nor phosphates; and the length of fibre in the cotton is not the land. Carbon is not a man, nor salt, nor water, nor calcium. He is all these, but he is much more ...; and the land is so much more than its analysis. The man who is more than his chemistry, walking on the earth, turning his plough-point for a stone, dropping his handles to slide over an outcropping, kneeling on the earth to eat his lunch; that man who is more than his elements, knows the land that is more than its analysis. But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry, and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself.'

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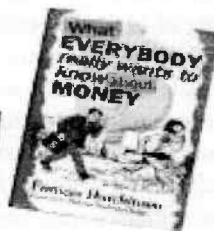
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