# BEYOND THE DEPENDENCY CULTURE PEOPLE, POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

by

#### **James Robertson**

#### **SECTION 1**

Section 1 contains the Contents page, the Foreword, the Acknowledgements, the Introduction and Chapters 1 to 4. Sections 2 and 3 containing all the other chapters can be downloaded from <a href="https://www.jamesrobertson.com/books.htm">www.jamesrobertson.com/books.htm</a>.

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# BEYOND THE DEPENDENCY CULTURE People, Power And Responsibility In The 21st Century

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## FOREWORD by Ronald Higgins

Independent writer and lecturer on issues of global security. His books include *The Seventh Enemy: The Human Factor in the Global Crisis* (Hodder 1978 and 1982) and *Plotting Peace: The Owl's Reply to Hawks and Doves* (Brassey 1990).

A certain serious politician recently told me with shame that he rarely found time to read more than one substantial book a year. I shall tell him that this should be it.

There will be no apology for suggesting a collection of essays and lectures, not even one stretching back twenty years. Many of the ideas in the earliest ones are as freshly apposite today as they were then. Some have already infiltrated the agendas of policy debate but need a fuller understanding. Others still await their time - just one mark of the author's originality.

Nor shall I allow my recommendation to be dismissed on the grounds that James Robertson and I are old friends (we have often disagreed, sometimes strongly) or that twenty-five years ago we were both members of Whitehall's policy-making caste. (We were already both showing signs of sceptical non-conformity beneath our clerical grey suiting.)

Robertson's thought has the clarity and logical rigour of the best policy-makers. But it rejects most of their easy assumptions, whether of left or right. He is a quiet revolutionary, throwing over the tables of inherited dogma. While he amply shares the general decline of confidence in governments and orthodox politics, he does not rest in the self-righteous passivity that afflicts so many. Instead, he readdresses the age-old questions of what kind of society we want, nationally, regionally and globally, and how individuals can best help to achieve one where self-reliance is a general reality, not a Thatcherite slogan with which to justify inequality.

He sees a principal cause of dependency - and of the poverty, unemployment and environmental damage it causes - in the 'enclosure' by rich and powerful people and organisations of more than their fair share of resources and the consequent exclusion of the

majority. He holds that citizens have not only individual rights but the right to an equal share in the commons created by society and nature at large. It is surely staggering that the denial of this proposition became commonplace in the last two decades.

Robertson's call for a post-industrial, post-modern revolution involves every aspect of life. The sheer range of these pieces is remarkable. Reading them will benefit questioners of conventional thinking in a multitude of fields including economic policy-making, work, welfare, money, health, the environment and nuclear power. But none of his subjects are treated shallowly: faced with a self-assured dogmatism, Robertson has an eye for the jugular. More than that, he offers constructive proposals for change.

The book primarily concerns the nature, prospects and reform of the industrialised societies of Europe and North America - from which geopolitical power is now shifting towards Asia. But the dominance of the prevailing Western ideology of hyper-industrialism and unexamined 'growth' mean they no less concern Third World and hence global development too. Indeed in global terms, the maldevelopment of the Rich North is arguably even more profoundly serious than the underdevelopment of the Poor South.

Over these twenty years, the author has been disappointed by the slow pace of change and perhaps become more conscious of the possibility of real catastrophe. Yet his passion and will for change remain clear. He sees our age as one of global, not just post-industrial, transformation involving a profound shift from dependency to co-operative self-reliance at every level, not least the local.

If this desirable and urgent transformation is actually to happen, we shall owe a great debt to daring yet systematic thinkers like him who have worked outside the great institutions and have seen the more vividly that the emperors have no clothes.

James Robertson has never accepted dependency himself and has become a powerful individual voice in the diagnosis and remedy of great but not inevitable evils. Not only politicians should read these lucidly written pieces: all thoughtful citizens - not least leaders of opinion - will do so to advantage.

Ronald Higgins

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many people have helped me, in one way or another, to develop the lines of thinking in this book over the last twenty years. The names of some are mentioned in particular chapters and chapter prefaces. There are many others - too many to name - from whom I have learned. I have good memories of my associations with them. My gratitude is due to them all.

My warm thanks go to Jeremy Geelan who asked me to publish in this Adamantine series; to Sheila Moorcroft for her invaluable help and advice in shaping the contents and coverage of the book; and to Jason Pearce and Lloyd Allen who took charge of the layout design and typesetting.

I particularly want to thank Ronald Higgins, not just for his Foreword but also for our friendship and our companionship as independent thinkers since the 1970s. Escapees, in his case from the Foreign Service, in mine from the Civil Service, we have worked in complementary fields since his publication of *The Seventh Enemy* and mine of *The Sane Alternative* in 1978, he on the need for change in international security and foreign policy, I more on the social and economic sphere.

My special thanks, once again, are for my wife, Alison Pritchard. She and I have worked together throughout these twenty years. I am very grateful to her for everything.

J.H.R., August 1997

#### INTRODUCTION

#### **Theme And Origins**

We need a new path of progress, based on co-operative self-reliance and not on the further growth of dependency. We need to create a world that empowers people (and nations) to take responsibility for their own further development in co-operation with one another. That is an important end in itself. It will also be the only means, barring worldwide catastrophe, of transforming today's ecologically destructive patterns of human activity into ways of life that can be sustained into the future.

That is the theme of the lectures and papers reprinted here. They span a twenty-year period from 1977 to 1996. They complement books published during that time - *The Sane Alternative* (1978, revised 1983), *Future Work* (1985) and *Future Wealth* (1990). They are selected from a large number of lectures and papers addressed to a variety of audiences and readerships. They reflect ideas about alternatives to dependency which have been gaining ground over that period, and are likely to be more widely accepted in the 21st century.

They are reprinted in chronological order, showing their dates. They are in their original form, except for one or two instances (indicated in the text) where passages have been left out to avoid duplication between one chapter and another. A few small clarifications and corrections have also been made, and a number of out-of-date references have been left out.

This Introduction, the Epilogue and a preface to each chapter have been written in 1997. New footnotes to the chapters are distinguished from original footnotes by being dated 1997. Otherwise, I trust it will be clear that the text of the chapters reflects my understanding of the situation prevailing when they were originally written, not now.

The focus of this selection is on the industrialised countries of Britain, Europe and North America. The top priority for us who live in these countries is change in our own societies - not just to create a better future for ourselves, but to enable us to contribute to the future of the world as a whole. So articles specifically concerned with global and Third World development have not been included.

Neither have any papers written for The Other Economic Summit and the New Economics Foundation since 1984. A separate selection of these may be published later.

A shift from dependency to co-operative self-reliance will be an essential feature of a successful transition to a post-industrial, post-modern age. Chapters 1, 2 and 8 are about the processes of this historic transition and about the emerging new worldview that will be part of it. Other chapters focus on what it may mean more specifically for politics (3 and 6), energy and resources (3 and 14), work (4), welfare (5 and 16), money (7, 12, and 15), health (9), and various aspects of national and local (and European) policy (11, 13 and 16). The different chapters cross-link with one another in many ways.

The book should interest people, especially younger people, who are professionally or academically involved in the future of society, politics, work, welfare, the monetary and financial system, health, economics, energy, resources and environment, and the other fields it discusses. But I hope it will also interest active citizens not professionally involved in those fields, who are aware of the need for radical change. Their role in helping to bring it about will be crucial. Owing to the pressures of professional groupthink and the over-riding imperatives of career survival and success, most mainstream practitioners in all walks of life - including politics and the communications media - become prisoners of the existing systems of organisation and perception in which they operate, and lose the capacity to do more than tinker with them. Countervailing pressures from active citizens outside are essential to getting important new issues and important new ideas on to mainstream agendas.

#### The Historical Context

A brief survey of the past twenty years and the next half-century will help to put these lectures and papers in context.

The dominant political rhetoric of the past twenty years, typified by the Thatcherite 1980s, has also professed hostility to "the culture of dependency". But, as will be clear, that is not to be confused with the approach to self-reliance developed in this book. That rhetoric was fundamentally dishonest. Those who propagated it gave no serious attention to helping people and nations to become more

self-reliant. On the contrary, their rhetoric masked a relentless drive to deepen the dependency of people and nations on big business and big finance, and to establish the supremacy of those institutions through global and national alliances with right-wing governments. The result, as everyone knows, has been greatly to widen the gap in power and wealth between rich and poor people and nations.

The strength of this right-wing revival reflected the strength of the backlash against state socialism and overpowerful labour unions. But, in any more fundamental sense, it was not a radical change. It was just another swing of the pendulum in the struggle between the elites of conventional industrial-age capitalism and conventional industrial-age socialism - their struggle with one another for power over the rest of society. The idea that its global counterpart - the collapse of communism and the Soviet Empire - was "the end of history" and not just the end of the Cold War, was the reverse of the truth. The truth is that removal of the threat posed by world communism has opened up the possibility of moving forward to a new stage of history, involving the radical transformation of "freemarket" capitalism too. It has created an opportunity to change direction to a people-centred or citizen-centred path of human progress, instead of a business-centred, finance-centred, or statecentred future.<sup>2</sup> It is that opportunity which is the subject matter of this book.

Far from having brought us to the end of history, then, the end of the Cold War confronts us with the need to decide what the next phase of history is to be. As the limits of the Earth's capacity close in, will people's dependency on the remote workings of national and multinational business, finance, government and the communications media grow ever deeper, and the gap between rich and poor, powerful and weak, dominant and dependent, grow ever wider? Or shall we, in order to meet the challenge of a shrinking world, break out of our modern culture of domination and dependency, and break through to a new post-modern culture of greater equality and self-reliance?

<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama: *The End Of History And The Last Man:* Penguin, 1992.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Some current mainstream rethinking is beginning to move in this direction. One example is the revival (Will Hutton: The State We're In: Vintage, 1996) of the 1970's idea of stakeholder capitalism, with a framework for business "based quite clearly on the requirement that those in charge shall serve the interests of all the stakeholders - including especially the employees, customers, investors and the public, as well as suppliers and creditors - and maintain a fair balance between them" (James Robertson: Power, Money & Sex: Towards A New Social Balance: Marion Boyars, 1976, pp. 52-53). But note that this still assumes an organisation-centred, not a people-centred, economy.

#### **Coming Changes**

The next half-century will see two great changes, one in the structure of world power and the other in the nature of economic progress worldwide. Both underline the urgency of creating a more democratic world order.

As regards the structure of power, the modern period of history has seen Europe and North America dominating the world politically, economically and culturally. In the 21st century that supremacy will decline. The balance of economic power is already shifting. Japan and South East Asia are competitive now. China, India, Indonesia and Brazil soon will be. As time passes, the balance of geopolitical power will shift too.

Britain was world leader in the 19th century, and sterling was the world currency. In the 20th century the USA became world leader, and the US dollar became the world currency. As Euroamerican power declines, what is to replace it? A new version of global domination and dependency under a new superpower - China perhaps - with us Euroamericans taking our turn to be under their thumb? Or can we create a more democratic world order than today's, which will protect us and everyone else more effectively from other people's superior power than the rest of the world has been protected from ours in the last few centuries?<sup>3</sup>

As regards economic progress, in its present form it is in its terminal stage. It is leading to a dead end - all too literally. Already, the present human population is consuming and polluting more than Earth can sustain. Ultimately world population is likely to double, if not more. That all people on Earth could ever attain the high-consuming, high-polluting ways of life of today's rich countries, is a sheer impossibility. A change of direction to progress of a different kind is bound to come, either through purposeful endeavour or as the aftermath of global catastrophe.

The only way to avoid catastrophe will be for the world community to agree and carry out a global compact on the following lines.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Another possibility, at least in the transition period, could be an oligarchic global order, with world leadership divided between a small number of regional blocs such as North America, Europe, and East Asia. But that might turn out to be only a half-way house to world domination by a new superpower.

- We who live in the rich North will have to use very much more efficiently than we do now a very much smaller share of the world's natural resources (which we now grossly overuse). That will mean using our "human resources" (which we now grossly underemploy and underdevelop) very much more efficiently too.
- We will have to persuade we cannot compel the "developing" countries of the South and the countries of the former Soviet bloc that they too should switch to this conserving and enabling development path. The South, in particular, must also be persuaded to limit its population growth. However, we high-consuming, high-polluting people in the North should not suggest that population control in the South is global priority Number One. If we do, we will simply provoke the South to respond that the top priority is for us to limit our consumption, pollution and waste, and the argument will get none of us anywhere.
- In our own self-interest, and in view of our heavy share of responsibility for the world's environmental and poverty crisis today, we should do all we can to help the South and the former Soviet bloc countries with this new approach to development.
- To do so effectively, we will have to democratise the institutions of global economic governance - including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the new World Trade Organisation. At present they are neither representative of nor answerable to the great majority of the world's peoples, and do not have their confidence.

Unless we can persuade the other peoples of the world to adopt this new more conserving approach to more self-reliant progress, their further development will put our future in peril as well as their own. In order to persuade them to adopt it we will have to adopt it wholeheartedly ourselves. Doing so will, in fact, help us to solve our own environmental problems and our own problems of unemployment, rising poverty and crime, growing "underclass" and declining social cohesion. So we will be creating better-quality lives for ourselves and our children; we will be leaving a fairer share of the Earth's natural resources and its capacity to absorb pollution and waste, for use by the peoples of the majority world; and we will be offering them a new model of development, to which we are clearly committed ourselves.

Our future capacity to play an effective role in the world as a whole will therefore depend on our giving top priority to shifting our own countries on to a new path of people-centred and ecologically benign progress. Scientists calculate that the required

"dematerialisation" of our economic lives may involve a reduction of up to 90% in our use of fossil fuels and other materials over the next thirty or forty years. But they also say this is technically feasible, and would improve the quality of life in many respects. The question is about the political will and the public understanding needed to carry it out.

#### "Post-Industrial" and "Post-Modern"

The terms "post-industrial" and "post-modern" have already appeared, and will appear again frequently. They call for comment.

First, neither says anything about the new era we are entering. They tell us only that the industrial era or the modern era is ending. However, that this is happening and we are entering a new era is important in itself. Nobody can yet know how the new period of history will be best described. And, in any case, our main concern is to help to shape it, not to predict or describe what it will be like.

Second, the term "post-industrial" can mean two different things. One, which I prefer to call "hyper-industrial" or "hyper-expansionist" (HE), refers to a marked acceleration of industrial-age trends and drives, and a consequent deepening of people's dependency on big organisations, powerful technologies, expert knowledge, and high finance. The other, which I call sane, humane and ecological (SHE), refers to a future in which progress becomes people-centred, as industrial-age trends and drives lose much of their force. As Chapter 2 suggests, the conflict between these two competing visions of post-industrial society can be seen, in terms that Marx might have used had he been living now, as the motor force which is driving the post-modern revolution.

Third, in literature and the arts the term "post-modern" is mainly used to refer to the breakdown of modern certainties and the onset of chaos and confusion: "'T'is all in pieces, all cohesion gone", as John Donne wrote of the collapse of medieval certainties and the birthpangs of modern understanding. But that need not prevent our using "post-modern" in a more constructive sense. Literature and the arts are about experience and expression - experiencing what is happening and expressing emotional responses to it. The practical response can then follow. For people living through the breakdown of modern ways of living, organising and thinking, the practical response is to help to shape viable post-modern

alternatives. As it happens, the social, economic, political and intellectual reconstruction envisaged in the following chapters does, in fact, display some of the qualities of diversity, freedom, equality, democracy and subjectivity which are regarded as characteristic of post-modernism in literature and the arts.

Fourth, "post-industrial" and "post-modern" convey different but complementary meanings. "Post-industrial" focuses attention on changes typical of the ending of the two-hundred-year period of the industrial age, contrasted with the changes that were typical of its beginning and its development. "Post-modern" focuses attention on the more fundamental changes typical of the ending of the five-hundred-year modern era, as contrasted with the changes typical of its beginning and development.

Readers will notice a tendency to shift from a post-industrial perspective in the earlier chapters to a post-modern perspective in the later ones. This reflects my growing awareness that, as the century and millennium draw to an end, the changes facing the industrialised countries - and all others - can only be understood, not just as a change in the industrial way of life, but as an aspect of wider and more fundamental changes affecting the world as a whole.

As I have said, the material reprinted here is mainly about aspects of the new path of progress as it will affect Britain, Europe and other parts of the North. But the modern culture of domination and dependency has pervaded the whole world. We are all caught up in it together. The same principles - the decolonisation of institutionalised power, and the liberation of people from it to be self-reliant, co-operative and responsible - are valid everywhere, as we seek to negotiate the worldwide post-industrial, post-modern transition.

The Old Bakehouse, Cholsey. January 1997.

#### **CHAPTER 1. POST-INDUSTRIAL LIBERATION**

This paper was written for an Acton Society Trust conference organised by Krishan Kumar at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, in July 1977. It was given again at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science on "Interdisciplinary Research and Social Progress" organised by Steve Cook at Aston University in September 1977. It was published in *New Universities Quarterly*, Winter 1977/78.

Since starting to work as an independent writer and speaker, I had published two short books in Marion Boyars' "Ideas In Progress" series - Profit Or People: The New Social Role of Money (1974) and Power, Money and Sex: Towards a New Social Balance (1976). Those were concerned mainly with changes I had learned were needed within the systems of finance, government and politics, during my twenty years' work in them. I was aware that this paper for the Acton Society Trust reflected advances in my thinking - the realisation that "developed" as well as "developing" countries had an informal sector, that the continuing replacement of informal by formal activities was a significant part of what is conventionally taken to be economic progress, and that the liberation of people from excessive dependency on the institutions of the formal sector would be analogous to the process of decolonisation which had accompanied the last years of the British Empire.

At the end of the paper I acknowledge my debt to Georges Gueron and Gurth Higgin. There were other influences too. The line of thought I was taking was stimulated by reading Ivan Illich's Celebration of Awareness, Tools for Conviviality and other books; and by my friendship with Peter Cadogan, who argued then - and does so still today - that the "gift economy" should play a larger part in our lives. The friendships we made with Hazel Henderson and Willis Harman, when Alison Pritchard and I did a ten-week journey round the USA and Canada in 1976, still contribute to my thinking on these questions today. To the friendship we made with Bill Dyson of the Vanier Institute of the Family in Ottawa, and his commitment to "seeing the economy whole", I owed many subsequent discussions in Canada.

January 1997

#### POST-INDUSTRIAL LIBERATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

IN this paper I want to explore the hypothesis that industrial society may develop towards the kind of post-industrial society in which people will be less, not more, dependent on money and jobs and public services.

The transition to such a post-industrial society would gather momentum as it became increasingly apparent that the most successful and rewarding way for many people to achieve satisfying material standards of living and a high quality of life was to play a more direct personal part in creating them for themselves and their fellows. This would involve a reversal of the prevailing tendency of industrial societies to institutionalise more and more aspects of production, consumption, caring, teaching, healing, and the other activities of life.

The possibility would arise that de-institutionalisation of economic activity would become a cumulative, self-reinforcing, self-sustaining movement - taking off in much the same kind of way as the industrial revolution took off in 18th- and 19th-century Britain. From one point of view this would be a liberation movement - people liberating themselves and others from dependence on the institutionalised economy. From another point of view it would be a process of voluntary decolonisation - the managers of the institutionalised economy aiming to enable other people to become less and less dependent on it. From a third point of view it would be a process of metaphysical reconstruction, <sup>1</sup> involving a revision of industrial/institutional concepts ofwork, wealth, and welfare. From all three points of view practical and conceptual questions would arise with which the social sciences, and especially economics, might find it hard to come to terms.

#### The Dual Economy

The economy is in two parts - the institutionalised part and the informal part.

The institutionalised part of the economy is the part in which people

<sup>1</sup> I owe this term to E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful,: Economics as if People Mattered*, Blond and Briggs, 1973.

work for money in jobs generated by the labour market; the goods they make and the services they provide are purchased for money or otherwise financed, for example by taxation. This part of the economy consists of the primary (farming, forestry, mining) sector, the secondary (manufacturing) sector, and the tertiary and quaternary (services and service-to-services) sectors. The informal part of the economy consists of the domestic (household) sector and the marginal (comnunity) sector. In this part of the economy the labour market does not operate (people don't have jobs), work is mainly unpaid (like housework), and goods and services are mainly given away or exchanged. The informal part of the economy is sometimes described as the gift and barter economy, as opposed to the money economy, though it also includes many unrecorded cash transactions.

Everyone lives, to a greater or lesser extent, in both parts of the dual economy. But in industrialised societies attention is concentrated on the institutional part of the economy, the part in which business corporations, government agencies and other organisations operate and in which individuals make and spend money. The prevailing concept of wealth is of something created in the institutionalised part of the economy by the 'economic' activities of industry and commerce and then spent, partly on the consumption of goods and services which people purchase from industry and commerce, and partly on the provision of 'social' well-being by public services. These public services are financed as a spin-off from the economic activities of industry and commerce, which are therefore seen as the 'wealth-creating' activities of society.

In all industrial countries there are important differences of opinionbetween conservatives and liberals, between capitalists and socialists, between spokesmen for business, finance, and trade unions, and among politicians, government officials, commentators in the news media, private lobbies and public interest groups about how the economy should work, and about what changes should be made in various aspects of it. But the prevailing assumption in industrial society is that the production of economic goods and the provision of social services by the institutionalised sectors are the only kinds of economic production and social provision that really matter. Economists and statisticians, politicians and civil servants, trade unionists and bankers, are concerned only with the kind of goods and services which cost money and with the kind of work which is done for an employer for

money -jobs in the so-called labour market. Work which is done in the household or marginal sectors, such as housework, does not count in the employment statistics; and goods which are produced there, such as fruit and vegetables grown in gardens and allotments, do not count in the Gross National Product (GNP).

The thrust of industrialisation, and the momentum it has developed in the past 200 years, has driven people increasingly out of the informal part of the economy into the institutionalised part. The pressure continues today. For example, single-parent mothers and fathers are encouraged to go out of their homes into jobs in the market, thus making the children dependent labour institutionalised child care services. In general, men, women and children alike are encouraged to look outside the home for work, for the physical necessities of life, for teaching, for care, for entertainment. The process has been self-reinforcing, like the drift from public transport to private transport. As economic activity has shifted away from the home and local community, the home and local community have become less and less able to meet the economic and social needs of the people who still remain there, thus pushing them also into the money economy and the labour market. This is a prime example of 'the tyranny of small decisions'.<sup>2</sup> The large decision - whether people would be better off if we generally lived a greater proportion of our lives in the informal economy - is pre-empted by the multitude of small choices which present themselves to us as the economy becomes more and more institutionalised.

#### **Limits To The Institutionalised Economy**

However, there is mounting evidence that limits may now be closing in on the institutionalised economy. We may classify these limits under four different headings: social scarcity; psychological remoteness; institutional congestion; conceptual disarray. I will touch on them very briefly.

**Social scarcity**. As Fred Hirsch has pointed out in *Social Limits To Growth*, <sup>3</sup> the growth of the institutionalised economy tends to decrease the value of socially scarce goods once they are attained. He cites traffic congestion and higher education as examples. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Fred Hirsch, Social Limits to Growth, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p.168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.66.

satisfaction derived from an automobile depends on the traffic conditions in which it can be used, and these will deteriorate as use becomes more widespread. The value of higher education, as a launching pad for a good job, is inversely related to the number of people who have also had access to it. As access to higher education spreads, therefore, its 'positional' value declines. Hirsch contrasts the positional economy with the material economy, and defines the former as covering everything that is either scarce in itself or subject to congestion by extensive use; and he points out that,

As general standards of living rise ... competition moves increasingly from the material sector to the positional sector, where what one wins another loses in a zero-sum game. As the frontier closes, positional competition intensifies ... In the positional sector, individuals chase each other's tails. The race gets longer for the same prize.

In other words, many of the goods delivered by the institutionalised economy become progressively less valuable as it grows. Eventually a limit is reached. The advanced industrial countries are not far off it now, in many respects.

Psychological remoteness. As more and more people in an industrialised society come to depend for more and more aspects of their life on the institutionalised economy rather than on the household and local community, their sense of alienation and dependence grows greater. They therefore feel entitled - indeed, compelled - to make greater and greater demands for jobs, for pay, for goods and commercial services, and for public and social services. Sooner or later the time is bound to come when these demands will outrun the economy's capacity to meet them, and at this point rising unemployment (too big a demand for jobs) and rising inflation (too big a demand for money) become systemic. Peter Jay described this situation last year as 'the contradiction of existing political economy' in a published paper on "a general hypothesis of employment, inflation, and politics". 4

the depressing conclusion that the operation of free democracy appears to force governments into positions (the commitment to full employment) which prevent them from taking the steps (fiscal and monetary restraint) which are necessary to arrest the menace (accelerating inflation) that threatens to undermine the condition (stable prosperity) on which political stability and therefore liberal democracy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Peter Jay, *Employment, Inflation and Politics*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 1976.

depend. In other words, democracy has itself by the tail and is eating itself up fast.

Institutional congestion. As the institutionalised economy developed, it inevitably became increasingly complex and congested. It has now reached the point where the supposedly wealth-creating activities of industry and commerce are generating such great social costs, and the interrelations between industry, finance, government, trade unions, and the public services have become so intertwined, that the workings of the system are grinding towards a halt. The American economist, Hazel Henderson, describes this as 'the entropy state' which, she says,

is a society at the stage when complexity and interdependence have reached such unmodelable, unmanageable proportions that the transaction costs generated equal or exceed its productive capabilities. In a manner analogous to physical systems, the society winds down of its own weight and the proportion of its gross national product that must be spent in mediating conflicts, controlling crime, footing the bill for all the social costs generated by the externalities of production and providing consumption, ever more comprehensive bureaucratic co-ordination, and generally trying to maintain 'social homeostasis', begins to grow exponentially or even hyper-exponentially. Such societies may have already drifted to a soft-landing in a steady state, with inflation masking their declining condition.<sup>5</sup>

**Conceptual Disarray**. The conventional 'economic/institutional' paradigm is beginning to lose credibility.

'First, the idea that economic wealth must be created by industry and commerce before it can be spent on the provision of social well-being by the public services is wearing thin. Increasingly, people are asking why it should be necessary, for example, to build and sell more automobiles in order to be able to afford more schools and teachers; or why it should be necessary to make and sell more cigarettes and sweets in order to be able to afford more doctors and dentists. What sort of 'wealth' is this, which is created and consumed in this way? Second, the idea that wealth is created in the formal sector of the economy but not in the informal sector - that the economic production of the country actually goes down if

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Hazel Henderson, *The Coming Economic Transition*, Princeton Center for Alternative Futures, 1976.

people grow their own vegetables instead of buying them in the shops - is also wearing thin.

The following two quotations illustrate the two growing areas of doubt.

To the indiscriminate growth economists it doesn't matter whether the products of industrial activity are more sweets to rot the children's teeth, or insulating blocks for houses. Essentially, the concern is with measured economic busyness rather than with purposes.<sup>6</sup>

How easily we could turn the tables on the economists if we all decided that from tomorrow morning, the work of the domestic economy should be paid for. Instead of cooking dinner for her own lot, each housewife would feed her neighbors at regular restaurant rates; then they'd cook for her family and get their money back. We'd do each other's housework and gardening at award rates. Big money would change hands when we fixed each other's tap washers and electric plugs at the plumbers' and electricians' rates. Without a scrap of extra work Gross National Product (GNP) would go up by a third overnight. We would increase that to half if the children rented each other's back yards and paid each other as play supervisors, and we could double it if we all went to bed next door at regular massage parlor rates. Our economists would immediately be eager to find out what line of showing fabulous investment was such growth capital/output ratio. They'd find that housing was bettered only by double beds and they'd recommend a massive switch of investment into both. Don't laugh, because in reverse, this nonsense measures exactly the distortion we get in our national accounts now.7

Economists are, in fact, increasingly beginning to claim that GNP has never purported to measure the use value of economic activity; they have always recognised that it simply represents the exchange value of all goods and services produced in the money economy; it does not differentiate between desirable and undesirable economic activity; nor does it differentiate between final economic consumption and intermediate economic activity which is under-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Peter Draper, *Economic Policy and Health*, Unit for the Study of Health Policy, London, 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Hugh Stretton, *Housing and Government*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1974.

taken to treat disease, clean up pollution, salvage accidents and mitigate damage caused by other economic activities. Some analysts are actually now suggesting that rising GNP in industrialised countries today probably measures mainly the rising costs of pollution, environmental degradation and human suffering; and, although that cannot be proved, it is a further indication of the declining credibility of rising GNP either as a measure of economic well-being or as a desirable goal of economic endeavour.<sup>8</sup>

#### The Future

A brief look at future possibilities will be helpful here.

The direction in which the economies of today's industrialised countries will develop during the next three or four decades can be envisaged as a mix between three possible futures or scenarios. Any one of these might prove dominant to a greater or lesser extent. The balance between them will change over time. They are: the industrial future; the hyper-industrial future; and the post-industrial future.

Industrial future. This would be one in which the mainspring of economic activity continued to be manufacturing industry. Industrial assumptions would continue dominant: wealth is created by the production and sale of material goods; wealth is consumed in the form of services and amenities, as well as material goods; the availability of good health, good education, and other forms of social well-being, thus depends on the continued prosperity of manufacturing industries like automobiles, chemicals and engineering; and the top priorities will continue to be industrial productivity and economic growth.

The industrial future represents a business-as-usual scenario. It implies that the problems of reconciling (a) high levels of industrial investment, (b) high levels of employment, and (c) the social and environmental impacts of industrialisation will continue to be important. It therefore implies a continuing high level of economic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> [1997 note. This has now been well documented, for example for the United States in the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare in the Appendix to Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For The Common Good, Redirecting the Economy towards Community, the Environment and a Sustainable Future*, Greenprint 1990, and for Britain in Tim Jackson and Nic Marks, *Measuring Sustainable Economic Welfare*, New Economics Foundation,1994.]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> [1997 footnote. By 1978 - see Chapter 2 - I had renamed these Business-As Usual, Hyper-Expansionist (HE) and Sane, Humane and Ecological (SHE).]

intervention by governments to control inflation and unemployment, to enforce pollution control, to provide social welfare, to give equal opportunities to minority groups, and so on. It implies a continuing distinction between the economic and social aspects of life, and between work and leisure. It implies that the 'work ethic' will remain strong, in the conventional sense that most people will continue to regard a job as a necessary prerequisite for status and self-esteem.

The strongest factor in favour of the industrial scenario is that the continuing momentum of existing trends and conventional economic aspirations is bound to influence the future very considerably. The doubt about it has already been pointed out. Evidence is accumulating that limits inherent in the economic/institutional paradigm may be beginning to close in.

Hyper-industrial future. This view of the future resembles the industrial view in many ways, but holds that the industrialised economies are now going through a significant shift of emphasis from traditional manufacturing industries to advanced technologies and knowledge-based service industries, which will open up new possibilities for expansion. Exponents of the hyper-industrial view<sup>10</sup> include Herman Kahn, <sup>11</sup> Daniel Bell<sup>12</sup> and Peter Drucker. <sup>13</sup>

The hyper-industrial future is seen as a logical extension of the industrial past. Just as the economies of today's industrial countries progressed historically from the primary commodity stage to the secondary manufacturing stage, so now they are progressing through the tertiary service stage towards the quaternary service-to-service stage. Among the growing points in an economy of this kind are universities, research institutes and consultancies, and industries like aerospace, telecommunications and computing. All these provide services to sectors like transport, communications and finance, which themselves provide services to corporations and individuals. Shifting the emphasis into these knowledge-based, high technology industries and services will, according to this scenario, enable today's industrial countries to retain their markets in the

 $<sup>^{</sup>m 10}$  Advocates of the hyper-industrial view often call it 'post-industrial', which is confusing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Herman Kahn, *The Next 200 Years*, Associated Business Programmes, London, 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. A Venture in Social Forecasting, Basic Books, New York, 1973.* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity*, Harper and Row, New York, 1969.

developing countries as the latter enter fully on the industrial manufacturing stage.

The hyper-industrial scenario shares the underlying assumptions of the industrial scenario, that 'wealth' is created by the provision and sale of goods and services which other people and other countries will be willing to buy, and that expansion can continue indefinitely. The prospect of space colonisation is an important element in it. So is the further development of nuclear power as an energy source. hyper-industrial scenario shares the industrial scenario's that economic relationship assumption the between industrialised and developing countries will continue to asymmetrical, with the former continuing to lead the latter along the path of economic progress. But the hyper-industrial scenario is more challenging than the industrial scenario. It holds that the future for today's industrialised countries lies in accelerating the shift from conventional manufacturing industry to the high technology, know-how, and professional service industries; and that the underlying task of the business system (and for public policy) in those countries is to manage this transition successfully.

There are powerful factors in favour of this scenario, including the widespread assumption that progress is to do with increasing technical sophistication and the extrapolation of existing trends. But it also raises technical, political, psychological and conceptual feasibility of widespread automation, difficulties. The colonisation, and massive nuclear power programmes in the next few decades remains in doubt. When the basic needs of billions of Third World people are not yet met, would it be possible for the industrialised countries to concentrate on creating a high technology Transitional unemployment themselves? industrialised countries might be unacceptably high; and, once the technocratic, automated hyper-industrial economy were achieved, would it be able to satisfy the higher level needs of the leisured irresponsible masses for self-esteem and self-actualisation? Finally, how would the hyper-industrial (hyper-institutionalised) economy be able to break out of the limits which (as we have seen) may now be closing in on the institutionalised economy?

**Post-industrial future**. Thus we have to envisage the possibility of an economic future not subject to the infeasibilities which might invalidate the industrial and hyper-industrial scenarios. This would be the post-industrial future. The post-industrial economy would differ from the industrial and hyper-industrial economies in two

fundamental features. First, its underlying principle would be equilibrium not expansion. Second, it would involve the deinstitutionalisation of economic activity, not its further institutionalisation. These two features would be closely related.

This paper is not concerned to evaluate the probability of a post-industrial future; nor to discuss the operating characteristics of an equilibrium economy, as such. My purpose is restricted to considering certain aspects of the de-institutionalisation of economic activity that would be part of the transition to a post-industrial, equilibrium economy, if that transition occurred. These can be outlined under three headings: liberation; decolonisation; metaphysical reconstruction.

#### Liberation

The following speculations will serve to indicate some of the questions that may arise.

People can liberate themselves - to a greater or lesser extent - from the institutionalised economy, and develop alternatives to it. They can decide to do more of their work and more of their living in, and around their households and local communities - to create use value rather than exchange value by their work. As more and more people decide to do this, they may become part of a widespread movement towards greater economic self-reliance, alternative technologies, alternative health, rural resettlement, and so forth. Many people in countries like Britain and the United States are already doing these things.

If this liberation movement continued to grow, it might well come to be seen as the post-industrial counterpart to the industrial revolution which occurred in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As a starting hypothesis, we may postulate that this post-industrial revolution would be predominantly social and psychological in character, whereas the industrial revolution was predominantly technical and economic. On that basis, it is instructive to examine some possible parallels with the industrial revolution relying on Peter Mathias's book *The First Industrial Nation* <sup>14</sup> as a pointer to some of its main characteristics.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Revolution*, Methuen, 1969.

One of the main prerequisites for the industrial revolution was the existence of sufficient economic resources to develop dimensions to the economy. In 18th century Britain plentiful coal and iron were conveniently placed for water transport in many parts of the country, and a strategic river system, based on the rivers Trent and Severn, stretched into the heart of industrial England. A corresponding prerequisite for the post-industrial revolution would be the existence of sufficient social and psychological resources to develop new social and psychological dimensions to our economic and political lives. These social and psychological resources could include: large numbers of active people leisured or unemployed; large numbers of active people socially and psychologically aware; a widespread understanding that psychological and social drives now provide the leading edge of change, not economic and commercial drives; and the existence of systems of education, information and communication not wholly closed to new ideas, not wholly mesmerised by conventional fashion, and not wholly dominated by 'economic and political forces committed to the status quo.

Another factor in the industrial revolution was inventiveness, a readiness to use other people's ideas and skills, and the capacity to generate an increasing flow of technical innovations through which physical production and economic productivity could be increased. The post-industrial revolution would also need inventiveness - to generate an increasing flow of social innovations through which the social and psychological equivalents of production and productivity can be increased.

Again, a new breed of entrepreneurs played a special part in the energetic experimentation and technical innovation which marked the industrial revolution. These were the men, to quote Mathias,

under whose charge new sectors of the economy could be developed and new inventions brought into productive use. Such men were the shock troops of economic change.

Who would be the entrepreneurs of social change today, who would facilitate new types of social activity and help to bring social innovations into widespread use? What sort of people would they be; and where would they be found?

Innovation in industry in 18th-century Britain also required the investment of financial capital in the productive process. New channels had to be created, through which money could flow to the people who wanted to use it from the people who had savings (i.e. surplus money) to invest. In due course there developed a linked

national network of financial institutions, including the country bankers, billbrokers and other specialist banks. and the intermediaries in the City of London, to handle the transfer of credit from one part of the country to another; and the habit of productive financial investment became established. What would be the postindustrial counterparts to financial capital, to the banking networks, and to the habit of productive investment? Instead of money, perhaps we would mainly be concerned with psychological and social energy. There are many people now who wish to invest their surplus psychological and social energy in other people's projects. They want to receive a psychological, rather than a commercial return on their investment. What new channels and networks would come into existence to link them with the social entrepreneurs and social innovators - the shock troops of social change - who need their backing?

The industrial revolution was a process of industrial innovation which became cumulative and self-sustaining. It was centred upon what Mathias calls the 'new matrix of industries, materials and skills', in which steam power, coal, iron machinery, and engineering skills played the dominant part. This new matrix gave increasing freedom from the old traditional limitations of nature, which had held back economic activity in all previous ages. How would the revolution similarly become post-industrial а self-sustaining process? What new matrix of psycho-social resources, techniques and skills corresponding to Mathias's matrix of industries, materials and engineering skills, would give increasing freedom from the limitations of personal and institutional behaviour which have held back psychological and social growth hitherto, and from the limitations now closing in on the institutionalised economy?

These are the kinds of question that could have practical relevance for the future. Would they be susceptible to economic analysis? Or is it part of their essence that they would not?

#### **Decolonisation**

If the development of alternative forms of economic activity by people outside the economic institutions can be seen as a process of liberation, the de-institutionalisation of economic activity by people within the institutions can be seen as a process of decolonisation. According to this view, the constructive task for people who work in government, business, finance, trade unions, public services, the professions and other areas of the institutionalised economy would be to reduce the dependence of other people upon it - i.e. to reduce people's dependence on jobs, on money and on goods and services provided by industry, commerce and the public services. The aim would be to enable people - as citizens, customers, workers, patients, pupils, and so on - to develop their own autonomy. The aim of managers, professionals, public servants, and so on, should be to work themselves out of a job - to make themselves redundant.

There is, in fact, some evidence already that professional and managerial people are increasingly trying to develop an enabling role, in which they help their clients to become less dependent on them. For example, I quote the following views expressed in a conference held three years ago in Ottawa on "The Serving Professions?".

Professionals should share rather than monopolise their privileged knowledge, give people a chance to learn while they are healing... If poverty is basically the absence of power, social action must involve giving people part of this power back. We lawyers should be training people to understand the law and apply it to represent themselves... The question we must seriously ask ourselves is to what extent are we as physicians prepared to disappear? What we should be asking in our relationships with patients is 'What have I done so this person can manage to do without me in the future?'... Among the social pitfalls fostered by the professions is the trend towards overdependency which verges on helplessness. Among the questions we professionals must ask ourselves is whether we are helpers or hinderers. Are we creating an endless production of services that draw us further into a trap? Do we, through the framing of laws and other structures create barriers that we then must spend valuable time breaking down again?"

Other specific examples of this idea that the managerial and professional role is to help people to help themselves - that managers and professionals should give away their powers and teach others to use them, rather than to monopolise them and hire them out - could be quoted from fields ranging from psychoanalysis through banking to environmental planning.

Let us consider briefly what this 'enabling' approach might imply for business and government. Take the oil companies as an example. Oil companies conventionally aim to sell increasing quantities of oil. We envisage the possibility that they would aim to help their customers to buy less oil, by reducing their dependence on it. In other words, the nature of the business would change from producing and selling oil, to helping people to meet their energy needs more independently. Similarly, pharmaceutical and food manufacturing firms conventionally aim to sell increasing quantities of drugs and convenience foods. We envisage that they would be helping their customers to reduce their dependence on these products. The nature of the business would then have changed from producing and selling health products and food products, to helping people to meet their own health needs and food needs in a more self-reliant way.

So far as governments are concerned, instead of continuing to build up capital-intensive industry, centralised energy systems, and bureaucratic public services - and increasing people's dependence upon them for their work, for their material needs and for their social well-being - governments would shift the emphasis to policies which helped people to become more self-sufficient and autonomous. For example:

- support for decentralised energy production and conservation;
- job creation programmes, started as a centralised policy for providing more jobs, but subsequently used to prime the economic pump at the local community level;
- investment in housing and other local facilities (including gardens, workshops, etc.) which would help to develop the economic and social self-reliance of households and local communities;
- research and development support for a wide range of advanced, small-scale technologies which would also contribute to the economic and social self-reliance of households and local communities;
- support for rural resettlement, small-scale agriculture, and parttime farming.

Similarly, we could envisage the possibility that financial institutions (like banks) might aim to help people to be less dependent on money, and that trade unions might aim to help people to be less dependent on jobs. In all these cases the same question arises: would enabling, decolonising decisions and policies of this kind on the part of business, government, and other economic institutions

be susceptible to economic analysis? Or is it part of their essence that they would not? There would certainly be a problem of how to justify such policies with reference to the kind of criteria with which economic institutions are familiar today. For example, suppose that a government decided to invest public money in a housing programme providing garden and workshop facilities. The aim would be to enable the occupants to become significantly less dependent on the shops for much of their food and many of their household items, and significantly less dependent on the labour market for their work. In other words, the government would be helping people to liberate themselves, at least to some extent, from dependence on the money economy. The problem is: not only would the direct financial return on the investment be 'uneconomic' (according to conventional criteria about rates of return), but the investment would actually reduce the level of measured GNP. So, although a housing policy of this kind might be very successful and valuable in social and human (and real economic) terms, it would be quite unjustifiable according to conventional economic criteria. There would be a multitude of similar cases, for example in spheres such as education and health, where enabling policies would seem to run counter to the conventional economic criteria used to evaluate new proposals today.

#### **Metaphysical Reconstruction**

Here are two examples of the kind of reconceptualisation that might take place, in the course of transition to a post-industrial economy.

Wealth. The new wealth might count as affluent the person who possessed the necessary equipment to make the best use of natural energy flows to heat a home or warm water - the use which accounts for the bulk of an individual's energy demand. The symbols of this kind of wealth would not be new cars, TVs or whatever, although they would be just as tangible and just as visible. They would be solar panels, insulated walls or a heat pump. The poor would be those who remained on centralised energy distribution dependent vulnerable to interruption by strike, malfunction or sabotage, and even more vulnerable to rising tariffs set by inaccessible technocrats themselves the victims of market forces beyond their control. The new rich would boast not of how new their television was but of how long it was expected to last and how easy it would be to repair. Wealth might take the form of ownership of, or at least access to, enough land to grow a proportion of one's food. This would reduce the need to earn an ever larger income in order to pay for increasingly expensive food. Wealth would consist in having access to most goods and services within easy walking or cycling distance of home, thus reducing the need to spend more time earning more money to pay for more expensive transport services. A high income would be less a sign of wealth than of poverty since it would indicate dependence on the provision by someone else of a job and a workplace in order to earn the income to rent services. Wealth would consist in having more control over the decisions that affected well-being and in having the time to exercise that control. 15

Work. The enormous intellectual and social ferment of our own times (whether we label it as future shock, or the transition to post-industrial society, the emergence Consciousness III or the stable state, or childhood's end) is the context for changing concepts of work. Changing concepts of work, whether at the personal or at the community or social level or both, are inescapably related to a changing sense of purpose - of what it is useful to do. The labour market cannot much longer elicit credibility as an organising device for the activity of working. The concept of work as something that must be socially productive in the eyes of the beholder is coming to be used to sort meaningful from empty jobs. A whole new concept of work is emerging which will dismiss as work much which now passes for it and will embrace as work much which is not now included in it. We are going to need to rely increasingly on individuals and communities to define their own concepts of work. 16

In both these cases of wealth and work - and the same applies mutatis mutandis to others like welfare and power - the essence of the new concepts would be that it was good to exercise personal control over economic decisions affecting one's own life and to be able to make those decisions according to one's own personal values; and that the desirable economy and society was one in which other people as well as oneself were doing the same. These new concepts would, at the least, call in question how far economic criteria could be applied which purported to be generally valid for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Tom Burke, *The New Wealth*, unpublished paper, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Gail Stewart and Cathy Starr, Reworking The World: A Report on Changing Concepts of Work, Ottawa, 1973.

everyone - for example, 'measurement of economic welfare' (MEW) statistics, based on consumption rather than production. More generally, they would call in question the opinion of leading economists like Jan Tinbergen that

progress in our understanding can only be based on the push for measurement of phenomena previously thought to be non-measurable. 17

It is doubtful if the development of any socioeconomic calculi (whether based on an integration of economic choice theory, political decision theory and game theory, or on a Gross National Happiness index derived from opinion surveys) could be relevant in a situation whose essence was recognised as consisting of a multitudinous plurality of separate value systems.

#### **Action Learning As The New Economics?**

The dichotomy between the two parts of the dual economy is, in fact, paralleled in other fields. In each case there are two different forms of activity, as in the dual economy. One is structured, quantitative and institutional; the other is unstructured, qualitative and personal. Thus we have:

- the institutionalised economy and the informal economy;
- scientific knowledge and intuitive understanding;
- representative government and community politics;
- organised religious activity and personal spiritual experience;
- an arm's length relationship (between professional and client) and personally shared experience.

The possible reversal of the present imbalance between the institutional and the informal parts of the dual economy is paralleled in these other fields. In all of them the same kinds of questions are arising. These questions are about domination and liberation, about rigidity and creativity, about the overdevelopment of old structures and the upsurge of new aspirations, and about how to reconcile the two opposed forms of activity. Both forms seem to be valid. Yet, as the eminent religious thinker Raimondo Pannikar has put it:

Applying logos to the myth, amounts to killing the myth: it is like looking for darkness with a torch. 18

Applying laboratory tests to spiritual healing, bureaucratic scrutiny to community self-help, or economic analysis to social innovation,

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<sup>17</sup> Kurt Dopfer (ed.), Economics In The Future, p.46, Macmillan, 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Raimundo Pannikar, *Myth in Religious Phenomenology*, Monchanin, Montreal, June/December, 1976.

may destroy the conditions in which spiritual healing, community self-help, or social innovation may take place - like looking for darkness with a torch. More generally, an over-emphasis on the structured, institutional and scientific tends to suppress the capability for unstructured, personal, intuitive action and understanding.

The real nature of the questions that could be arising in this situation for the economic and social sciences is suggested in the following remarks about the exploration of consciousness in Willis Harman's recent book, *An Incomplete Guide to the Future*. <sup>19</sup> Harman 'says:

Essentially there are two quite different forms of knowing, and we all use both daily. One form is knowing about things in the manner of scientific facts; it is based on rational and empirical processes. The other form is knowing by intuitive identification with, as in knowing another person; it is based to a considerable extent in unconscious processes... Both kinds of knowledge are subject to the possibility of error. The scientific way of 'knowing about' involves meticulous testing to insure that what is claimed as fact can be validated by other scientists making similar experiments or explorations. But 'intuitive knowing' also demands careful testing to prevent self-deception... In opening uр the exploration consciousness, scientists are forced to confront questions that, throughout most of the history of scientific activity, they have managed to set aside for the philosophers to puzzle over. What are the essential limitations of 'knowledge about', or factual knowledge? What are the ultimate capabilities of the mind as an observing instrument in discerning intuitive knowledge of the universe and of the mind itself? What are the ways in which intuitive knowledge is best shared and validated?

The new questions arising now for economists include the counterparts of those: What are the essential limitations of formal economics? What are the capabilities of formal economics for understanding (and contributing to the success of) informal economic activity? What are the ways in which choices (including 'resource allocation') can be validated and actions and experiences (including 'production' and 'consumption') can be valued, in the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Willis W. Harman, *An Incomplete Guide to the Future*, Stanford Alumni Association, California, 1976.

informal economy? In the nature of the case the answers to these questions will not be formulated in advance or from outside by economic theorists. They will only be learned by personal practical experience in the informal economy. Is that where the new frontier for economics will be found? Make room for the barefoot economist.

#### **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to M. Georges Gueron of the International Foundation for Social Innovation in Paris, and to Professor Gurth Higgin $^{20}$  of Loughborough University of Technology, for recent opportunities to work on some of the ideas in this paper.

7 St. Ann's Villas, London 1977

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 $<sup>^{20}</sup>$ [1997 footnote. Gurth Higgin's *Symptoms Of Tomorrow*, Plume Press/Ward Lock, London, 1973, is a book which did not attract the attention it should have done. I greatly admired it and learned much from it in the later 1970s.]

#### **CHAPTER 2. A POST-MARXIST STRATEGY**

The paper reprinted in this chapter was given at a session on "Responsibility and Response-ability" at a national conference on "Shaping The Future: Canada In A Global Society" at the University of Ottawa in August 1978. It was published in the Conference Proceedings, edited by Walter Baker, Centre for Policy and Management Studies, Ottawa.

It takes forward the ideas in Chapter 1, as subsequently developed in *The Sane Alternative*. After referring to the two contrasting visions of a post-industrial future outlined there, Hyper-Expansionist (HE) and Sane, Humane, Ecological (SHE), it gives particular attention to the SHE alternative, analyses the nature of the new direction of progress it will involve, and discusses the strategy needed to bring that change of direction about.

The late 1970s was an exciting time, when many people's ideas about "alternatives" was developing rapidly. This chapter reflected an advance on the thinking in Chapter 1 in the following respects:

- the idea that conflict in late industrial society would increasingly tend to polarise around the two visions of post-industrial society;
- the idea that, in Marxist terms, that conflict could become the "motor force" driving a post-industrial (as contrasted with a proletarian) revolution; and
- the idea that the strategy appropriate to a peaceful postindustrial revolution could be defined by contrast with the Marxist strategy for a proletarian revolution.

January 1997

### A POST-MARXIST STRATEGY FOR THE POST-INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

At the genesis of all revolutionary action lies an act of faith: the certainty that the world can be transformed, that man has the power to create something new, and that each of us is personally responsible for this transformation.

This quotation from Roger Garaudy's book, *The Alternative Future*, provides an apt keynote for what I have to say. In asking me to give a paper on "Responsibility and Response-ability", the organisers of this conference had in mind that I would discuss "individual responsibility and the human and institutional constraints to moral initiative" in the broad context of "Culture, Society and the Individual". I shall address this question in the context of a revolutionary situation. The revolution in question is the post-industrial revolution. Responsibility concerns what we ought, and response-ability what we are able, to do to help to bring this revolution about.

One of the most pressing problems today for many people in countries like ours is that they do not like the way things are going, they know that a better alternative must be possible, but they do not see how they can help to bring it about. They feel helpless as individuals. They get no constructive vision or sense of purposeful solidarity from their institutions - political parties, churches, and so on. They feel imprisoned and immobilised by their own selves - by their habits, their personality, and the knowledge of their own past ineffectiveness. They also feel imprisoned and immobilised by their institutions; they dare not rebel against the firm on which they depend for their job and their pension, the mortgage company on which they depend for their house, the utilities on which they depend for necessities like heat and light, the medical and social services on which they depend for their welfare.

Discussion of what to do often revolves around the dilemma: should we first try to change society, or ourselves? Politicians and economists are among those who tend to assume that we should concentrate on changing the structure of society - either by reform or revolution - in order to create the kind of environment in which people can live better lives. Priests and psychiatrists, whose concern is directly with people, are among those who tend to assume that we should concentrate on changing ourselves, since otherwise we shall be incapable of creating a better society. The

fact is, of course, that the dilemma is total. Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?

This, then, is my starting point. Each of the ways in which people traditionally strive to create a better world - economic and social reform, political revolution, and personal change - is doomed to failure unless we pursue all three simultaneously. So far as reform is concerned, I have described elsewhere 1 how the "institutional imperative" ensures that all reform will be too little and too late. Another British thinker,<sup>2</sup> Ronald Higgins, also with personal experience of high level government, has recently concluded that the frightening inertia of our political institutions is one of the main factors leading us into a world of rapidly mounting confusion and But political revolution is no answer either; it merely substitutes one set of rulers - one form of domination - for another, and otherwise leaves things much as they were or worse. Finally, concentration on personal change is all too often tantamount to dropping out, turning one's back on the world in order to take care of oneself. Those who commit themselves to economic and social reform, or to political revolution, or to personal change, as the may find self-importance, self-expression and selfsatisfaction in so doing. But it is self-delusion for them to suppose, in the face of all evidence, that they will thereby create a better world.

The realistic approach is to seek to change society and ourselves at the same time, by the same actions. The search is for ways in which people can simultaneously change the direction of their personal lives, contribute to reforming the institutional structure of society, and help to bring about a post-industrial revolution which will create a better society. My aim in this paper is to suggest what this will involve.

The approach is a personal one. It is practical, not academic. I shall outline the future that I hope to help create, and suggest ways in which we can help to create it. Up to this point I shall be drawing on the themes of *The Sane Alternative*. But then I shall break new ground and, in the last main section of the paper, I will try to show

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Higgins, *The Seventh Enemy: The Human Factor in the Global Crisis*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> James Robertson, *Power, Money and Sex: Towards a New Social Balance*, Marion Boyars, 1976.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> James Robertson, *The Sane Alternative: Signposts to a Self-Fulfilling Future*, Robertson, 1978. [1997 footnote. In the revised 1983 edition the subtitle became *A Choice of Futures*.]

that my approach, though not Marxist, takes account of Marxism in certain significant respects.

This is important. Our vision of the future is post-industrial, not pre-industrial; it builds on and goes beyond the technical progress made since the Industrial Revolution. It is post-modern, not pre-modern; it builds on and goes beyond the economic and cultural progress made since the Renaissance. It is post-Christian, not pre-Christian; it builds on and goes beyond the spiritual progress made in the Christian era. Similarly, our perception of how the post-industrial revolution will take place must build on the insights about the dynamics of social change which Karl Marx and his followers have given to us, and go beyond them. It must be post-Marxist, not pre-Marxist.

### **Outlines Of A New Future**

The industrial age is ending. Athough many people still find it difficult to imagine anything other than a Business-As-Usual future, such a future is not feasible for the industrialised countries or the world as a whole. Limits - physical, social, psychological, institutional, conceptual - are closing in. Britain, the first industrial country, is among the first to hit these limits. In other countries of Europe and North America industrialism may have a few more years to go, but not very many.

So what sort of post-industrial society do we want?

Leaving aside the possibilities of Disaster and Totalitarian Clampdown (both of which have their prophets), there are two sharply contrasting views of post-industrial society. I refer to them as the Hyper-Expansionist (HE) future and the Sane, Humane, Ecological (SHE) future. The second is the kind of post-industrial society I want to help to create. I shall briefly describe it: first by contrasting it with the HE future; second, by suggesting some of the changes it would involve.

## A Hyper-Expansion (HE) Future

The HE view of the future has been expounded by North American thinkers like Herman Kahn and Daniel Bell. They assume that the post-industrial revolution will be a transition to a super-industrial

way of life. High technology industries like aerospace, computing and telecommunications will set the pace, supported by the professions information-handling knowledge-based, occupations. The service industries will continue to overtake manufacturing as the growth points of the economy. Personal and social services, including the provision of care, amenity and entertainment, will continue to become more institutionalised and professionalised. By accelerating these existing trends in modern society - and by relying on advanced science and technology in areas like space colonisation, nuclear energy, automation, genetic engineering and behavioural manipulation - the super-industrial peoples will be able to break out of further limits to material According to this scenario the most important new breakthroughs will continue to be geographical and physical, The assumption is that if European, economic and technical. scientific, expansionist, economic, masculine man will have the courage of his convictions, he will be able to brush aside (or at least bring under control) the political, social and psychological problems, as well as the economic problems, that beset industrialised societies today.

This approach to the future implies an ethic of elitism and domination in a class-divided world. Internationally it implies that, by becoming super-industrialised as the less developed countries become industrialised, today's industrialised countries will maintain superiority. implies their economic Ιt that within superindustrialised country there will be two sharply polarised classes - a responsible technocratic elite in charge of every important sphere of life, and the irresponsible unemployed masses with little to do but enjoy their leisure. Apart from one's moral reservations about this scenario, there are strong doubts about its technical and economic feasibility, and it also seems quite unrealistic from a political, social and psychological point of view. It may be best to regard it as a Utopian projection of the fantasies of the dominant technocratic elites in the affluent countries today.

## A Sane, Humane, Ecological (SHE) Future

This contrasting view of post-industrial society is based on the assumption that the most important new frontiers are now psychological and social (personal and human) not technical and economic. Whereas the industrial revolution was primarily about the development of things, the post-industrial revolution will be

primarily about the development of people; it will enable human beings to break out of the psychological and social limits which thwart further progress today, just as the industrial revolution enabled them to break out of the constraints which limited their technical and physical capabilities 200 years ago. This means that the transition from industrial to post-industrial society will involve a change of direction, not an acceleration of industrial trends.

Among the foreseeable changes of direction will be the following:

- from economic growth to human growth,
- from polarisation of sex roles in society to a new balance between them,
- from increasing specialisation to increasing self-sufficiency,
- from increasing dependence on big organisations and professional know-how to increasing self-reliance,
- from increasing urbanisation to a more dispersed pattern of habitation.
- from increasing centralisation to more decentralisation of power,
- from increasing dependence on polluting technologies that waste resources and dominate the people who work with them to increasing emphasis on technologies appropriate to the environment, to the availability of resources, and to the needs of people, and
- from increasing emphasis on rationality and the left-hand side of the brain to increasing emphasis on intuition and the right-hand side of the brain.

(In this paper I am dealing with the post-industrial revolution only as it will affect the "overdeveloped" countries. However, it should be noted that these changes of direction will apply also to "less developed" countries, where a needs-oriented approach to development may already be superseding the pursuit of blind economic growth. So far as the international economic order is concerned, SHE post-industrialists (by contrast with their HE opponents) aim for economic convergence between overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries, which will enable all the inhabitants of the planet to achieve an adequate and sustainable level of material life early in the next century. This approach is sometimes called "Another Development"<sup>4</sup>.)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See, for example, *What Now? Another Development*, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, 1975.

We can imagine what this change of direction will involve by remembering that industrialisation has tended to shift activities (growing food, baking bread, caring for old people, for example) out of the informal part of the economy in which work is done for love into the formal part in which work is done for money. In the HE future this tendency would be accentuated; many activities still carried on today in informal, interpersonal, familial, neighbourly relationships would become the formalised work professionals attending to the needs of customers and clients. In the SHE future, on the other hand, this tendency will be reversed. People will live a greater part of their lives in and around their homes and local communities, doing more for themselves and for one another. People will become more self-reliant, more familial, Work, leisure, education, and family life will more neighbourly. become more closely integrated, not more fragmented. different compartments - schooling, work, retirement - in which the young, the adult and the elderly are now expected to live their lives, will begin to break down.

This change of direction will involve reversing today's increasing financial indebtedness (through mortgages, hire purchase, credit cards, etc.) and increasing financial commitments (to pensions, insurance policies, etc.) which now keep people's noses to the grindstone of paid work. It will require new financial institutions - local enterprise trusts, appropriate technology investment bonds, ecological land bonds, land trusts, etc. - which will enable people to invest their spare money in developments which they themselves support. It will involve many other reforms of the existing monetary and financial system (national and international) which will allow people and localities to take more control over their personal and local interests, and to reduce their dependence on outside sources of money.

In the SHE future an education system mainly geared to the qualifications will become of paper increasingly irrelevant. Education will aim at preparing young people for a job (if they have one), and for useful and rewarding unemployment (if they do not), and (in either case) for personal growth and a good quality of adult life. Education will be recognised as an aspect of life which should continue from the cradle to the grave, and not as provided during childhood and adolescence something professional teachers in special institutions called schools and colleges. As the prevailing concept of education develops in this way, increasing numbers of young people will wish to become more

deeply involved in real-life activities centred around their homes and local communities. At the same time, changing patterns of work, leisure and retirement will be involving adults and elderly people more deeply in these activities, too. These changes will soften existing demarcation lines, not only between men and women and between old and young, but also between education, work, leisure, preparing and growing food, and many other aspects of personal and community life.

In short, as we move into the SHE future, more and more people will perceive the need to liberate themselves and one another from excessive dependence on the system - for their employment, social services, health, education, politics, and so on. At the same time, more and more people working in the system will begin to perceive the need to "decolonise" it before it breaks down; that is, to enable people to reduce their dependence on it and become more self-reliant. These concepts of liberation and decolonisation are central to my theme.

## The Nature Of The Challenge

A post-industrial revolution on these lines, involving a change of direction from material growth to personal and social growth, will be as large a historical change as the Industrial Revolution two hundred years ago. How will a change of this magnitude come about? And what can we do to help it come about as smoothly and peacefully as possible?

First, we can learn useful lessons from the Industrial Revolution itself.

The Industrial Revolution was not brought about by enlightened government policies. It was not brought about by political revolution. It happened because an old way of life had reached its limits, because innovators and entrepreneurs then opened up new space, and because multitudes of people then followed them into it in a self-sustaining cumulative process. The innovations and new enterprises of that time were of a technical and economic nature. They have altered the whole character of society - the ways people work and live and think. The innovations and new enterprises of the post-industrial revolution will be personal and human, social and psychological. They, too, will alter the whole character of society. Social and psychological innovators and social and psychological

entrepreneurs will provide the shock troops for the post-industrial revolution.

Second, we should understand that the industrialised way of life is breaking down, and we need a breakthrough to a post-industrial way of life. This immediately suggests three vital tasks: to speed up the breakthrough; to ease the breakdown; and to help both to come about in such a way that they combine in a single process of evolutionary transformation.

We can speed up the breakthrough by helping to liberate ourselves from too much dependence: on employers for our work; on business corporations for our food and the other goods we need; on the medical profession and the drug companies for our health; on the educational profession and educational institutions for our learning; on professional priests and religious organisations for our spiritual needs. A very wide range of activity is opening up here, in alternative economics, alternative technology, alternative health, alternative education, alternative politics, alternative religion, and many other fields.

We can ease the breakdown by helping other people to become more self-reliant and less dependent. Doctors can help people to become more self-reliant about their health. Engineers can develop small-scale technologies which will enable people to provide for their own energy needs, or to repair their own houses and cars and household equipment, in a more self-reliant way. Government officials can work out policies which will enable people to do more for themselves and one another in their own localities, and thus to become less dependent on government services. These are three examples - doctors, engineers, government officials - of people with professional or managerial positions in "the system", who can help to ease its breakdown by helping people to become less dependent on them. They will be giving away their own power over these people, before it breaks down. They will be decolonising the system, iust as the European powers found it necessary to decolonise their empires.

We can help breakdown and breakthrough to combine in a single process of evolutionary transformation by helping people to understand what is going on, and by helping them to see the future in new ways. For example, we may be able to help protagonists of human scale technologies, organic agriculture, rural resettlement, a small business (or common ownership) economy, alternative

approaches to education or health, and so on, to see that these are connected parts of the same new frontier. Or we may be able to help to replace today's industrial concepts of wealth, work, growth, power, and so on with post-industrial concepts as the dominant concepts in people's thinking.

Third, we need to understand the psychological aspects of the post-industrial revolution. It will involve grieving for the industrial age which is passing. It will be like a crisis of adolescence, in which children liberate themselves from their parents, and parents decolonise the relationship with their children. It will be like a midlife crisis, in which a person rethinks the direction of his life. It will be like a personal breakdown in which the individual's old way of life becomes blocked or collapses around him, until he finds the ultimate reserve of energy which enables him to break through to a new way of life.

### **A Multitude of Roles**

The post-industrial revolution will be a pluralist, polymorphous, polycentric process. It will be brought about by many different types of people, acting in many different fields, and interacting with one another in many different roles.

In *The Sane Alternative* I identified ten positive roles, which I called "transformation roles", as follows:

- people whose aim and skill is to speed the breakdown of the old system, by helping to make it inoperable and destroying its credibility; theirs is a <u>demolition</u> role;
- people who are trying to improve the old system, by introducing changes which will make it better and stronger; their aim is to avert the breakdown of the old, but their actions may help to ease the transition to the new; theirs is a <u>reforming</u> role;
- people who are creating and developing the growth points for a new society; theirs is a <u>construction</u> role;
- people who aim to liberate themselves and other people from their present dependence on the existing system of society; theirs is a <u>liberating</u> role;
- people who are working to ensure that the old system breaks down as painlessly as possible for everyone who is dependent on it; in managing its collapse, theirs is a <u>decolonising</u> role;
- people who, as liberators or as decolonisers, are helping other people to take more control over their own lives in health, or

politics, or learning, or religion, or their economic activities or in any other important aspect of their life; theirs is an <u>enabling</u> role;

- people who are changing their personal way of life, and helping other people to change theirs, so that their lives will be more consistent with their image of a sane, humane, ecological future; theirs is a <u>lifestyle</u> role;
- people who are exploring and communicating new concepts of power, wealth, work, growth, learning, healing, and so on, appropriate to a sane, humane, ecological society; as the paradigm shifters, the ideological revolutionaries, theirs is a metaphysical reconstruction role;
- people who recognise that all these different sorts of people will contribute positively to the transformation of society, and who are working to make sure that the transformation, though polycentric, is a widely understood, widely shared process of conscious evolutionary change; theirs is a <u>strategic</u> role;

I also identified four negative or neutral roles:

- people who refuse to countenance the breakdown of the old system and its replacement by a new one; in trying to suppress the activities of the people listed above, theirs is a <u>reactionary</u> role;
- people who, having themselves failed in their own attempts to change society in one way or another, are confident that no one else will succeed, and anxious that they should not; they include Nestorian wiseacres, but mainly theirs is the <u>pessimistic and</u> <u>cvnical</u> role;
- people who are humble (or superior) observers of what is happening and who, while they enjoy talking about it, writing about it, and scoring points off one another about it, do not want to take part; they can be helpful or unhelpful; theirs is the academic role;
- and, finally, people who, wanting simply to get on with their own lives in whatever circumstances happen to exist, are not particularly concerned to encourage change or to resist it; theirs is the <u>routine practitioner</u> role.

How will people playing these different roles, in many different fields of activity, interact with one another as the post-industrial revolution gathers pace? We cannot discuss this in detail here. But, as in his day Karl Marx confidently expected a general polarisation around the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, so today we should expect all sections of society to polarise to a greater or

lesser extent around the two sides of the coming conflict between the protagonists of the HE and SHE visions of post-industrial society.

## What Would Marx Say?

A friendly critic recently told me that my thinking seemed to miss the kind of issues which have been the central concerns of the traditional Left. It appeared to be based in:

what might be termed a liberal conception of the human being and social relations: the individual is a fairly powerful entity, possessing a fair amount of freedom, who can exert influence in the realm of ideas. This is quite plausible from a middleclass vantage-point, but it makes very little sense from that of about 50% of the population of a nation such as Britain. The Left, therefore, has generally dubbed such conceptions as "bourgeois idealism" - meaning, in effect, a projection from the bourgeois' own place in society. Instead, it has advised us to take very seriously the huge differences in power and in material interests between the classes in society; and it looks for radical social change, not through the work of individuals in "transformation roles", but through the concerted action of a whole class. Even though such action may bring about some hurt, the argument is that it is the only way that the "class conflict" can be won.5

I understand why I have given this impression. The principal concerns and strategies of the contemporary Left in the industrialised countries carry little more conviction with me than those of the contemporary Right. Nonetheless, as I said at the start of this paper, one of the features of industrialised society today is a widespread sense of personal helplessness, and one of the greatest needs is for a new sense of constructive solidarity that will enable people to act. In this respect, among others, my perception of the situation is similar to Marx's perception of the situation which prevailed in the nineteenth century. Indeed, I suspect that if Marx were living now the prospect of transforming today's industrialised society into the SHE future would grip his imagination, just as strongly, as the prospect of transforming 19th century capitalism into his vision of communism gripped it during his actual lifetime.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Personal correspondence from Dr. Tom Kitwood, School of Science and Society, University of Bradford, England.

Marx's thinking bears more directly on the post-industrial revolution than does the thinking of many of his followers living today.<sup>6</sup>

Marx saw that the prevailing economic and social relations between people in a society corresponded to the stage of economic development which that society had reached. As he said,

The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

He saw that every society contained inherent - and, as we would now say, escalating contradictions in its existing structure of relations, which would eventually lead to its collapse. This applied to ancient society and to feudal society and it applied - so he thought - especially to capitalist or bourgeois society. The future would thus contain a qualitative break. A new kind of society would come into existence. A new epoch would be born.

For such a transformation (or revolution) to occur, Marx pointed out that not only must the objective circumstances have developed to the right point, but the subjective condition must also have arisen. By this he meant that there must be widespread consciousness of the nature of the situation and of the action needed to transform it. He identified alienation as an important ingredient in this widespread growth of consciousness - alienation being the process which leads people to realise they are treated as mere commodities in the kind of society that currently exists. He saw that those who are thus alienated from the dominant values of their society will eventually form a large section of it, drawn together by consciousness of their common condition.

Thus, Marx argued, as the contradictions in the existing structure of economic and social relations become more acute, the most powerful forces in society will polarise around two conflicting sets of interests. The dominant set of interests will be enforced by the dominant section of society. The opposing set of interests will be developed by the alienated section of society, which the dominant section has brought into existence in opposition to it. Because of the contradictions in the existing structure of society, either the alienated section will eventually win its struggle for liberation, or the whole society will collapse.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The literature is, of course, immense. A useful summary is in A.S. Cohen, *Theories of Revolution*, Nelson, London, 1975.

In all this, Marx's thinking helps our understanding of what the post-industrial revolution will involve and what will bring it about. There are, however, two crucial differences in the situation as it exists today and as it existed in the nineteenth century. The first concerns the two sides in the struggle. The second concerns the role of the State.

In industrial societies today, the structure of relations between people who own the means of production and people who sell their labour has changed so fundamentally since Marx that it no longer throws up two separate classes of people. Every inhabitant of Britain, for example, is now an owner of the means of production, through insurance companies, pension funds, or public corporations (including nationalised industries); at the same time, the majority of active people are now paid employees. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in Marx's sense, no longer exist. Their heirs today are the people who are trying to create a technocratic (HE) future and those who, emerging in opposition to them, are trying to create a humane (SHE) future. These are the opponents whose conflict is beginning to provide the motor force for the post-industrial revolution.

In Marx's day it was reasonable to argue that the main function of the State was to provide the ruling class with an instrument of control and, in the last resort, of violence with which to dominate the rest of society. According to Marx, therefore, the revolutionary class must take over the State, turn it into their own instrument for dominance and control, and use it to effect the revolutionary transformation of the old form of society into the new. transformation would consist of rooting out the remains of the previous ruling class, eliminating the class antagonisms surviving from their period of dominance, and enabling a new society - a new set of social and economic relationships - to emerge "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". The emergence of that new society would permit, and at the same time require, the State to wither away, since a ruling class would no longer exist which might need to impose its will upon society by force. The State could thus be expected to decolonise itself (in my terminology), to give away its powers over people, and to enable people to exercise power for themselves.

Marxists still approach the transformation of society as a two-stage process on these lines, with the State playing a centrally important

role. They have been mainly concerned with questions arising at the first stage, when the revolutionary class takes over the State and establishes its own rule. Such questions have revolved around the identity of the revolutionary class (e.g. are peasants included as well as workers?) and about the role of the revolutionary party (e.g. should it lead the masses and impose revolutionary goals upon them from outside, or should it merely enable them to channel their energies into the achievement of revolutionary goals which are their In general, Marxist thinkers have devoted much less own?) attention to the question of how the second stage is to be accomplished - how, once established, the dictatorship of the revolutionary class will decolonise itself, dismantle the State, and bring the new society into existence. The great exception is Mao, of course. Having led the revolutionary Chinese masses successfully through the first stage, he developed the strategy of permanent revolution to ensure that, even if the second stage were not accomplished, at least it would not be altogether forgotten.

As post-Marxists we may agree with the classical Marxist view that the State reflects and aims to perpetuate the prevailing structure of economic and social relations. Like all institutions the State is, in cybernetic terms, "programmed to produce itself". It is "dynamically conservative'. Its transformation - in a sense, its withering away - will be an important feature of the post-industrial revolution. Where the post-Marxist goes beyond the traditional Marxist is in recognising that the complex of institutions which make up the late twentieth century industrialised State is qualitatively different from the nineteenth century European State experienced by Hegel and Marx, and the twentieth century Russian and Chinese States experienced by Lenin and Mao. This means that the classical Marxist two-stage strategy of revolutionary transformation - first take over the State and then use the State as an instrument with which to dismantle itself - is no longer valid, if indeed it ever was.

Two developments, in particular, have changed the nature of the State. In the first place, the kind of corporate Welfare State that has now grown up in a country like Britain extends its activities right through industry, the trade unions, the social services, the professions and other parts of society. As I have said, the people who carry out its functions no longer represent a different class of people from the rest. In their different roles as pupils, students,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Stafford Beer, *Designing Freedom*, John Wiley, 1974.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Donald Schon, *Beyond The Stable State*, Penguin, 1973.

workers, customers, taxpayers, patients, savers, pensioners, etc., most people belong on both sides of the old divide between society and the State. In this sense the people have already infiltrated the State and taken it over. By contrast with an earlier stage of industrial capitalism, when people of one class may have used the State to dominate and exploit people of another, one of the main features of today's industrial societies is that people use the extended State to dominate and exploit one another, and even to dominate and exploit themselves, wearing another hat. second place. the process which I have referred to elsewhere as "dismantling the Nation State" is gathering momentum. In Britain, for example, the increase of international government activity and power at European and world levels, together with increasing pressure for the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales and other "regions", and also to the truly local level, has begun to whittle away the significance of national sovereignty. Both these developments have outdated the idea of a revolutionary takeover of the State. It has become both pointless and unfeasible.

This explains why traditional left-wing approaches to the future of industrial society now lack credibility. The following comments on three recent British approaches of this kind are relevant.

Stuart Holland's proposals for a programme of full, centrallycontrolled, nationalisation seem to depend excessively on the rationality and public-spiritedness of governments and trade unions, for which there is little historical evidence. Moreover, in the face of his own evidence he nowhere shows how national governments can control the operations of the multinational companies, which evidently are in a position to adapt their strategies to suit the circumstances of any particular nation state. Glyn and Sutcliffe look forward to "the control by the working class of its own fate in a democratic socialist system", but they don't anywhere spell out how this is going to be achieved, and certainly give no evidence that the working class movement itself is moving in this direction in Britain ... Nairn's vision is frankly apocalyptic. The British political system will fragment, and out of the ashes of a disintegrated United Kingdom will rise the phoenix of the English working class, the bourgeois scales finally fallen from its eyes, and capable at last of realising its common struggle

and common destiny with the international working class movement. 9

As awareness spreads that traditional, Marxist strategies now lack credibility in the industrialised West, and that the situation has developed beyond the capacity of traditional Marxist theory to explain and transform, a new consciousness is emerging in opposition to the dominant values and the dominant system of today's society. It is a consciousness of being exploited, deprived, de-humanised, alienated, just as Marx described. But we feel that the exploitation, deprivation, dehumanisation are now imposed as much by ourselves as by others. The new consciousness is of people becoming aware of the need to liberate themselves and one another from dependence on the system. This consciousness represents what Marx would have called the subjective condition for the post-industrial revolution. Those in whom 'it is rising are beginning to form what Marx would have called the new "revolutionary class".

### A Non-Violent Revolution

So, reverting to the title of this paper - responsibility and responseability - what should we do and what can we do?

I have made it clear that I hope the post-industrial revolution will be a non-violent transformation of industrialised society. It will happen because industrialised society is breaking down and because people are beginning to see a better alternative to it. It will happen because more and more people are beginning to understand that by liberating themselves from excessive dependence on the system which industrialised society has created they can enjoy a better quality of life, and that by liberating themselves from unnecessary material wants they can develop themselves more richly as people.

In every department of their lives there is a multitude of ways in which people can begin - many have already begun - to liberate themselves, and help one another to do the same. There is no need to try to destroy the system or take it over. It will be enough to withdraw support from it: to work rather less in the paid job, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Krishan Kumar, "Thoughts on the Present Discontents in Britain", to be published in *Theory and Society.* The references are to: Stuart Holland, *The Socialist Challenge*, Quartet, 1975; A. Glynn and B. Sutcliffe, *British Capitalism, Workers, and the Profits Squeeze*, Penguin, 1972; and Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, New Left Books, 1977.

rather more at unpaid work at home and in the local neighbourhood; to spend rather less money on food, or repairs, or entertainment, and to give rather more time to growing food, doing repairs, and creating entertainment for oneself, one's family and one's neighbours; to give rather less time and attention to remote forms of politics. and rather more time and energy to important local issues that affect the life of oneself and one's friends more closely; and so on. As more and more people become aware that more and more people are doing this, more and more people will become conscious of belonging to the new "revolutionary class".

It would be naive to suppose that everyone in dominant positions will be eager to give their power away, or that everyone in dependent positions will be eager to liberate themselves. Domination is what provides a sense of security and self-worth for some people; dependence is what provides it for others. The SHE vision of the post-industrial future will be rejected by both these types. As its prospect becomes more likely, the possibility of mass psychosis among them, leading to new forms of facism, is not to be ignored. They will do all they can to create the HE future, with its dominant technocratic elite and its dependent, irresponsible masses. Failing that, they will try to impose Totalitarian Clampdown as second best.

But there is also a more favourable side to the situation. As industrialised society reaches its limits and begins to break down, more and more people in managerial and professional positions are beginning to feel they are imprisoned in worthless roles. They find it less easy to help, or to dominate, those who are supposed to be They begin to yearn for a more convivial, dependent on them. more familial, more neighbourly life for themselves. They begin to see that their own liberation depends on giving their power away. They begin to want to help their customers or their clients to be less dependent on them. They begin to think about the changes and reforms that will be necessary in order to decolonise their part of the system. As these people decide to change the direction of their own lives they will, ipso facto, be deciding to change the structure of relations in society. It is of such changes in the existing structure of relations that the post-industrial revolution will consist.

## Conclusion

There are many crucial questions, especially about the organisation necessary to carry out the post-industrial revolution and about its international aspects, which there is no time or space to discuss here and now. But let me conclude by saying briefly why I believe that our two countries - Britain and Canada - may both be expected to play important parts in it.

Britain, as I have said, was the first industrial nation and is among the first to reach the limits of industrialism. We have never committed ourselves as wholeheartedly to material economic success as have some other peoples, such as the Germans, the Americans, and the Japanese. Our recent economic problems have, to some extent, reflected our preference for quality of life.

I believe that, in fact, the post-industrial revolution has already started in Britain. One morning we shall wake up and realise that, in spite of the exhortations of the economic Cassandras, we have been beginning to move unconsciously and crabwise into the post-industrial future.

In Canada, of all the other countries I know, one finds the most healthy scepticism about a Business-As-Usual future, based on indefinite economic growth and the continuing sovereignty of the nation state. I am aware of more serious thinking in Canada at all levels of society about the prospect of a post-industrial society than in any other country. This thinking covers the possibilities and practical implications of a more conserving society, a more familial society, and a more needs-oriented approach to Third World development - including, by an extension of that concept, the future development of the indigenous peoples of Canada.

That is why I expect both Britain and Canada to play important parts in the post-industrial revolution, with citizens of both our countries continuing to work on it together.

> 7 St. Ann's Villas, London 1978

# CHAPTER 3. POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A CONSERVING SOCIETY

This paper was given at a meeting of PARLIGAES, the Parliamentary Liaison Group on Alternative Energy Strategies, organised by Renee-Marie Croose-Parry, at the House of Commons, London on 4th December 1979. It has not been previously published.

PARLIGAES still exists and is, indeed, going strong but under another name. It is now called the Parliamentary Renewable And Sustainable Energy Group (PRASEG), and is based at the International Institute for Energy Conservation.

Renee-Marie Croose Parry now lives in Florida. At the time of writing this, Alison Pritchard and I are about to go to Cuba for a conference on Environment and Society which she is helping to organise there.

January 1997

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A MORE CONSERVING SOCIETY

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American essayist and philosopher, once said that "the English mind turns every abstraction it can receive into a portable utensil or working institution." That is a suitable text for this paper. My aim is to provide a sketch map of the terrain, so to speak, in which decisions about energy alternatives are being and will be made. So, although the subject sounds rather abstract, I believe that what I have to say has practical relevance for anyone who has to decide or wishes to influence alternative energy strategies.

The paper has three main sections. The first deals with the shifts that are currently taking place in our perceptions of political economy, and the second with the comparable shift that is taking place in our approach to the use of resources. Against that general background, the third section discusses some specific questions raised by the prospect of reducing the use of energy, whether to support our present way of life or to meet the energy needs of a society whose direction of development has significantly changed.

# Changing Perceptions Of Political Economy<sup>1</sup>

How do political and economic decisions get made? How should they be made? Different people operate with different perceptions - different conceptual models of the processes of politics and the economy, and different assumptions about which issues are fundamental. In this section I shall discuss several different models (all of which are alive, if not well, today) and suggest that the balance is shifting between them - in other words, that what has been called a paradigm shift is taking place in the sphere of political economy.

Three conventional models of political economy have been competing with one another in late industrial Britain. They are models of how political and economic decision-making ought to be structured. We all know what they are. So I shall summarise them baldly, and indicate what kind of measures for achieving a more efficient use of energy are implied by each.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, (Oxford University Press, 1977) provides a stimulating analysis of successive models of liberal democracy.

**Model 1** is the market model originally developed by Adam Smith. Identified with it today [i.e in 1977] are politicians like Sir Keith Joseph and economists like those belonging to the Institute of Economic Affairs.<sup>2</sup> Its assumptions are that people act as individuals bent on maximising their own economic benefit; if they are left free to do so, the price mechanism will automatically bring supply and demand into balance, and the invisible hand of the market place will ensure that the outcome is the greatest possible benefit to the greatest possible number of people. According to this view, it can and should be left to rising energy prices and falling energy supplies to do what is necessary to bring about energy conservation and more efficient energy use.

Model 2, at the other extreme, is the model of the beneficent state. Identified with it today [1977] are politicians on the Labour Left like Tony Benn. The assumption is that governments have the capacity and should have the will to take optimal economic decisions and allocate resources optimally on behalf of the people. Those who take this view favour centralised economic planning by the state, including comprehensive national energy planning, and government control of important economic activities - the "commanding heights" of the economy. So far as energy conservation is concerned, rationing by regulation is preferred to rationing by price; government R. and D. programmes should develop energy saving techniques and processes, and government policies should diffuse them.

**Model 3**, between these two extremes, is the model of the mixed economy, corrected market economy, or managerial economy. This is associated with the "moderate" wings of the Conservative and Labour parties and with the Liberals, and involves a degree of cooperation between the corporate estates of the realm - business, labour and government, in particular. In practice, this has been the dominant model in Britain for most of the last 30 years, the argument having been mainly limited to the desirable mix between market and state, and the required degree of correction of the market by the state. So far as energy is concerned, this model implies - in addition to measures appropriate to the previous two - that taxes and tax concessions, government subsidies and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> [1997 footnote. Sir Keith Joseph was outstanding among the leading British Conservatives who, in opposition in the 1970s and after 1979 during the early years of the Thatcher government, helped to develop the "free-market" approach to policy making in many fields. The Institute of Economic Affairs was the "think tank" most closely associated with this approach.]

government contracts should be used to encourage more efficient energy use by the private sector.

Two shared assumptions underlie these three models, one economic, the other political.

The first is the assumption that objectively optimal economic decisions are available, and that the object of the exercise is to identify these decisions, make them, and implement them. The market model claims that this is all done automatically by the market's invisible hand. The beneficent state and the mixed economy don't have recourse to the invisible hand. They have to rely on magic of a different kind - namely the economic calculations, including cost/benefit calculations, of experts - to discover what the optimal decisions are. In the field of energy policy, for example, a daunting amount of abstruse economic calculation is taking place today.<sup>3</sup>

The second shared assumption concerns the political relationship between the individual and the state. All three models focus on decision-making at the national level in Westminster and Whitehall, coupled with the right of individuals to choose every few years what government they wish to have. Apart from the corporatist tendency of Model 3, none of the three models pays much attention to the plurality of interest groups and organisations, active in both the public and the private sector, which mediate the relationship between the individual and the state. All three models tend to regard the citizen as an individual consumer in the market for political goods.

However, the credibility of this set of models has now worn thin. Whatever the theory may say, market freedom in practice favours the rich and powerful, and fails to bring about adjustments in the use of scarce commodities quickly and smoothly. The theory of the beneficent state is equally naive. In practice, state control is seen to give certain interest groups an unfair share of economic power, and state planning is no more successful than the market in adjusting to the changing availability of resources. The mixed economy appears muddled and inadequate both in theory and in practice. The elaborate economic analyses by which its decisions are theoretically supposed to be validated seem, in their complexity and their ultimate irrelevance to the actual outcome, increasingly like the theological enquiries (how many angels can stand on the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> [This is no less true in 1997 than it was in 1977.]

point of a pin?) characteristic of medieval society in its declining years.

Another model (**Model 4**) has therefore been taking the place of the first three in many people's minds. This is a model of conflict. It describes what is, rather than what ought to be. It holds that political and economic decisions are reached by a continuing process of adjustment between competing elites in an oligopolistic market. The three previous models - free market, beneficent state, and mixed economy - are, on this interpretation, merely the labels and banners under which various competing elites group themselves to sell their wares and fight their campaigns.

In my view this model, Model 4, gives a fairly realistic account of how political and economic decisions have been reached in recent years. It applies both to the competition for political power (characterised by success in acquiring votes) in a political market dominated by a small number of big political parties, and to the competition for economic power (characterised by success in acquiring money) in an economic market dominated by giant corporations and big industrial pressure groups. It helps to explain why strategies which seem obviously desirable under Model 3 (the rationally managed mixed economy) attract so little support and such strong opposition. A strategy to encourage traffic to shift from road to rail - and from car to bus - in the interests of safety, amenity, equity and energy conservation, is a case in point.

Model 4 also suggests that decisions about the future of nuclear power will depend less on supposedly objective analyses of economic benefits and costs than on struggles between the political and economic interest groups primarily involved. Not the least important factor here, incidentally, is political fear of the coal mining industry. Since the Heath government's defeat by the miners in 1974 and the electricity cuts and blackouts of subsequent winters, Conservatives in particular have been afraid of the power of the miners and of the political purposes for which that power might one day be used. This is why it is helpful to the nuclear industry to have a militant miners' leader prominent among their opponents. He reinforces the feeling in many people's minds that a

bigger nuclear industry would be a useful countervailing force against the kind of threat which he himself represents.<sup>4</sup>

Model 4, then, leads us to recognise that decisions, including future decisions about energy, will be shaped by sets of interests and considerations much more widely ranging than simple pursuit of economic gain, public interest, or a mixture of the two. It helps us to reject the utilitarian myth that there is one best set of decisions for society and that the argument is about what it is. The pluralist model enables us to perceive that every decision favours some people and disadvantages others, and that the argument is about who is to benefit and who is to suffer. In public policy research, including research into energy options, this implies a form of cost/benefit analysis which works out who is likely to get what benefits and who is likely to pay what costs, in place of the conventional form which purports to make an objective calculation of total benefits and total costs. The same applies to employment impact analysis. We don't want global figures. We want to know what sort of people in what sort of places are likely to gain and to lose what sort of jobs. 5

But that is not quite the end of this part of the story. Model 4 itself is now being increasingly questioned. The competing political and economic institutions of late industrial society are felt to be overdeveloped. The thrust of industrialism has led to the monetisation of many goods and services that used to be exchanged in family, neighbourly or other interpersonal relations of a social kind, to the professionalisation of knowledge and function previously open to all, and to the centralisation (for example, in London) of political and economic power on which local life is now dependent. A dominant feature of political and economic argument in the coming years is likely to be a sharpening conflict between those who want these trends to continue and those who are working for a change of direction. I have discussed at greater length in *The* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> [1997 footnote. The reference here, obvious in 1979, was to Arthur Scargill. Subsequently, the defeat of the 1984/85 miners' strike by the Thatcher government led not only to the run-down of the coal-mining industry but also to a weakening of Conservative support for nuclear energy.]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> David Elliott, in *Energy Options and Employment*, (CAITS, 1979) has made a start. [1997 note. CAITS, the Centre for Alternative Industrial and Technological Systems, had been set up by Mike Cooley and his colleagues from the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards' Committee to promote the concepts of socially useful production and human-centred technologies on which their dispute with Lucas Aerospace had been based. "The choices are essentially political and ideological. As we design technological systems, we are in fact designing sets of social relationships, and as we question those social relationships and attempt to design systems differently, we are then beginning to challenge in a political way, power structures in society" - Mike Cooley, *Architect Or Bee?*, 1979.]

Sane Alternative the two contrasting visions of post-industrial society - technocratic and humane - which underlie this conflict.

According to this perception, the competing elites of Model 4 are only one half of the picture, the other half being the people -whether as individuals, or as members of groups, or as residents of localities -whom the elites aim to keep in a state of dependency. While the elites may compete against one another in a "horizontal" dimension, the more important fact is that they co-operate collectively with one another (as Big Brother) in "vertical" opposition to the people. Thus whereas Model 4 focuses on conflict between the coal and nuclear industries as two competing elites, the emerging new model of political economy, Model 5, perceives them both as belonging to an overdeveloped, dominant production system, whose interests are in conflict with the best interests of people.

In other words, **Model 5** focuses on the conflict between the interests that benefit from centralisation and dependency and the interests that would benefit from decentralisation and self-reliance. As regards energy use and energy supply, it recognises the scope for more self-sufficiency in energy at every level - for households, factories and offices, localities and regions - as an alternative to dependence on large, remote, nationally and internationally controlled sources of supply, whether dominated by coal miners, nuclear engineers, or oil sheikhs. And it recognises that energy conservation makes a direct contribution to greater self-reliance.

As Model 5 begins to replace Model 4 as the basic model of conflict in society, it points towards the emergence of a new decentralised model (Model 6), which will compete with Models 1, 2 and 3 as a normative description of how political and economic decision-making ought to be structured. Many people are already working to clarify this model in industrialised and Third World countries alike. They refer to it under terms like "alternative society" or "another development".

For practical purposes, I believe that these six models - Models 1, 2, 3, and 6 being ideas of how political economy should work, and 4 and 5 being models of conflicts that actually exist - embody the basic political assumptions and perceptions which will bear significantly on the energy debate and on energy decisions in the coming years But a concluding reference to Marxism may be in place. Model 2 - the beneficent state - is the closest of the five to

conventional Marxism. Model 5, as I have discussed elsewhere<sup>6</sup>, has interesting similarities and dissimilarities with Marxism. Few people today are unaffected by Marx's insights - as by Darwin's and Freud's - but it seems likely that the impact of Marxist thinking on British politics and economics will continue to be mediated through models such as those sketched here, rather than through a specifically Marxist model. So far as energy policy is concerned, for example, it is not readily apparent what a Marxist energy policy for Britain would entail.

## A More Conserving Society

Hazel Henderson speaks of the progression of Western economies from the "soaring 'sixties" through the "stagflation 'seventies" to the "economising 'eighties". She calls herself a counter-economist. But you don't have to be a counter-economist to recognise that, as we now enter the 1980s, we are almost certainly entering a period in which the husbanding of resources - including energy - will receive more attention than in the recent past. By "recent past" some people mean the period of 35 years since World War 2, others the 100-year period of the Petroleum Age, others again the 200-year period of the Fossil Fuel Age (corresponding roughly to the Industrial Age). But however you define the recent past, you will - if you are a realist - expect our society to be at least somewhat more conserving from now on.

The recent shift in the way we think about resources is significant. The distinction between non-renewable and renewable resources is quite new for most of us. But it is now obvious that it makes sense to treat non-renewable resources as capital to be conserved and invested for future returns, and renewable resource as income to be spent up to but not beyond their replacement rate, i.e. the rate at which they can be renewed. Less widely perceived as yet - but the idea is hovering on the brink of our awareness - is that, in addition to non-renewable and renewable resources, an important third category of resources exists: resources which can be positively developed and increased by using them fully. These latent resources include in particular the energies and skills and capabilities of people.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "The Politics and Economics of HE and SHE", *Built Environment*, Vol.4, No.4, 1978.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Hazel Henderson, *Creating Alternative Futures*, Berkley Windhover, New York, 1978.

Until recently, the practical implications of conserving natural resources seemed to get more attention from public policy analysts and business strategists in North America than in Britain or Europe. (A couple of years ago I was involved in work by the Canadian Government on "Canada as a Conserver Society", 8 and in the preparation of guidance given by SRI International (formerly the Stanford Research Institute) to its international business clients about "Voluntary Simplicity" and "Business Success Equilibrium Economy". 9) On the technical scope for energy conservation, the work of British researchers like Gerald Leach 10 compares more directly with that of their opposite numbers in North America like Robert Socolow. 11 No doubt the reason why political and business thinking on the implications of a more conserving society has been slower to get off the ground in Britain is because in recent years most of our political and business thinkers have been so heavily committed to the issues thrown up by the conflicts of Left v Right and labour v management.

Fortunately, this is now beginning to change. And, at the more academic level, the work of modern American economists like Herman Daly<sup>12</sup> on a "steady state economy" and Kenneth Boulding<sup>13</sup> on "spaceship economics" has certainly been paralleled by that of modern British economists like E.J. Mishan<sup>14</sup> on the costs of economic growth, Fred Hirsch<sup>15</sup> on the social limits to growth", and of course E.F. Schumacher<sup>16</sup> on economics as if people mattered. Going further back, two of the best-known political economists in British history, J.S. Mill in *Principles of Political Economy* in 1857 and J.M. Keynes in *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren* in 1930, both looked forward to the time when material growth would come to an end and we could concentrate on quality of life.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Canada as a Conserver Society: Resource Uncertainties and the Need for New Technologies, Science Council of Canada, Report No. 27, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> James Robertson, *Business Success in an Equilibrium Economy*, SRI International, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>Gerald Leach, *A Low Energy Strategy for the United Kingdom*, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), 1979.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Robert H. Socolow, *The Coming Age of Conservation*, Annual Review of Energy, Vol.2, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Herman Daly (ed.), *Toward a Steady State Economy*, Freeman, 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Boulding, *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth*, (in Daly above).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> E.J. Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth*, Penguin, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Fred Hirsch, Social Limits to Growth, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, Blond and Briggs, 1973.

Industrial society is a production-oriented society, dominated by of goods, commodities and services commerce, government, and professions - rather than by their users. It is also a masculine society, in which high priority is given to the satisfaction which grown-up boys can get out of designing and making and playing with new technological toys. You need look no further than this year's and last year's programmes of PARLIGAES meetings to see how dominated they are by men, most of whom still want to discuss alternative ways of producing energy rather than alternative ways of using it. As questions about the efficiency with which we use resources and the purposes for which we use them grow in urgency and importance, masculine producer interests which want to preserve or increase their existing power are increasingly likely to see the shift towards a more conserving society as a threat.

Thus two types of conflict in the energy debate will increasingly cut across one another. First, there will be conflict of the conventional type between different producer interests - PWR against AGR reactors, for example - and their political associates, seeking to strengthen their relative positions in the economy. I visualise these as "horizontal" conflicts in the context of Model 4 discussed above. Second, there will be conflict between the energy producers on the one hand, pressing in general for new developments in energy production, and on the other hand the user/citizen interest demanding that top priority should be given to more efficient and economic energy use. I visualise this as a "vertical" conflict in the context of Model 5. In general, producer interests will argue that further quantitative growth is desirable and feasible, while citizen interests will press the claims of qualitative growth. Questions about the meaning (or meaninglessness) of statistical measures like GNP will feature increasingly in the debate.

One last point about conservation generally. There is no doubt that the increasing urgency of conserving energy and other natural resources, and using them better, will provide exciting problems for scientists, engineers and architects, exciting commercial opportunities for industrialists and business people, and exciting challenges for policy-makers in government and the public services. But in itself the idea of a more conserving society is not very inspiring. It smacks of restraint. It can all too easily seem negative and grudging. The conservation of amenity can be a cover for the conservation of privilege. The conservation of resources can be

used by rich people and rich countries as an argument for asking poorer people and poorer countries to tighten their belts. Only when the idea of a more conserving society is seen as one aspect of a larger, more positive vision of the future, is it likely to become an important energising force. I shall return to this point later.

## **Using Less Energy**

Theoretically, energy can be conserved <u>either</u> by reducing energy intensity, in other words by increasing the efficiency with which energy is used for particular activities, <u>or</u> by reducing the level of the activities themselves, <u>or</u> by a combination of both. For example, you can increase the efficiency of your car and the way you drive it, to get the same mileage for less petrol; or you can reduce your mileage; or you can do both. You can increase the efficiency of your home heating, to maintain the same temperature for less expenditure of fuel; or you can reduce the temperature of your home; or you can do both.

I shall start by discussing some of the implications of improving energy efficiency while maintaining a conventional development path, and then move on to the possibility of shifting to an alternative development path which would, among other things, involve greatly reduced consumption of energy,

The Leach Report on a Low Energy Strategy for the United Kingdom <sup>17</sup> concluded that the general level of economic activity in Britain could double or treble by the year 2025, without requiring a higher use of primary energy than today. This conclusion was based on a sector-by- sector analysis of the potential scope for greater energy efficiency in the domestic, industrial, commercial and institutional, and transport sectors and in the energy-producing sector itself.

The Leach Report did not examine in depth the non-technical factors which might encourage or discourage the development and use of energy-conserving innovations in those sectors. In addition to the broad political and economic factors discussed earlier and the obvious financial question whether the savings from a particular innovation are likely to justify the costs, important non-technical factors will Include: the perceived objectives of managements and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See footnote 10 above.

their efficiency; the readiness of organised workers to accept change; the scope for changing design conventions and accounting conventions; the scope for changing the professional education of builders, engineers, planners, and so on; and the responsiveness of the Internal decision-making processes in firms and other organisations. Many of these factors as constraints on innovation generally were discussed at a conference on Technology Choice held in London last year by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Intermediate Technology Development Group. The same factors will obviously affect the introduction of energy conserving innovations.

Other questions concern special interest groups. Some consumer organisations are now getting together with environmental groups in a National Energy Efficiency Forum. The social services may also want to work out specific ways in which they could help their clients to meet their needs for fuel and light and power efficiently. Workers in the building trades clearly have an interest in energy conservation. Their trade unions may want to do more to encourage it.

A further set of questions concerns economic distortions. For example, as a general rule the Installation of equipment in households - including energy-conserving or, indeed, energy-producing devices -attracts no capital grants or depreciation allowances as does the construction of new oil rigs and pipelines and other energy-producing facilities by commercial firms. Nor does household investment form part of the public investment programme, as does the construction of new power stations. There is thus a systemic bias in favour of energy production by the public and corporate sectors, and against energy conservation (and energy production) in the domestic sector. How might this be removed? (Energy is, of course, only one area in which this general bias exists in favour of the corporate against the domestic sector of the economy.)

But perhaps the crucial factor is how the energy industries perceive their role. Hitherto, the Gas and Electricity Boards, the oil

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Proceedings, *Technology Choice and the Future of Work*, British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1978. [1997 note. The Intermediate Technology Development Group intended to follow this up with a project on technology choice funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation. But this did not happen. Nearly twenty years later the need for public understanding and discussion about how decisions are taken about technological innovation, and how the decision-making processes could be changed to take greater account of social and environmental objectives, is greater than ever.]

companies and the coal industry have not perceived it as their prime objective to help people to meet their energy needs economically. They have not taken on responsibility for achieving an efficient match between the specific forms of energy supplied and the specific tasks for which the energy is used. (Using high cost electricity for low grade space heating is an often quoted example of a wasteful mismatch. Amory Lovins 19 compares it to using a chain-saw to cut butter or a forest fire to fry an egg. The energy industries' prime objective has been to meet demand for their product and to sell it in competition with one another. Tariffs, for example, have favoured customers who use more, not less. The forceful marketing of appliances has encouraged customers to use more, not less. There has been no question of positively encouraging and helping all customers to adopt the optimal mix of gas, oil, electricity, solid fuel and energy conservation for their particular needs.

I am not blaming the energy industries for this, or suggesting that they have altogether ignored the need for energy conservation. That would be unfair and untrue. The question is, how might the energy industries be motivated to regard it as part of their prime function to improve the energy efficiency of their customers? Could the objectives of the nationalised energy industries as formally laid down by statute be revised with this in view?<sup>20</sup> What comparable obligations could be placed on the oil companies? Could new pricing policies, new management objectives and new criteria of management success be worked out for the energy industries which would positively encourage conservation?<sup>21</sup>

Suggestions of this kind call in question the conventional economic assumption that growth, including the growth of production and sales by nationalised industries, is the main criterion of success. Is it reasonable to expect managers in the energy industries to discard that assumption, if no one else does? Although the Leach Report

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Amory Lovins, *Soft Energy Paths*, Penguin, 1977.

 $<sup>^{20}</sup>$  [1997 note. Following denationalisation of the UK energy industries it is no longer possible simply to legislate a change in their objectives. Raising the price of energy by replacing existing taxes with higher taxes on energy, as proposed in Chapters 13 and 16 below, may now be the best way to give an incentive to the energy industries to see themselves as providers of services rather than suppliers of commodities.]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>The Changing Expectations of Society in the Next Thirty Years, the report of a recent international conference on the future of Management Development held by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business and the European Foundation for Management Development, identified the management of conservation as an increasingly important area of opportunity and challenge for management generally.

assumed that the energy sector alone would embrace conservation as a prime goal, while conventional growth would remain the goal for other sectors of the economy, it may be more realistic to assume that a serious re-orientation towards conservation in the energy industries will only take place as part of a shift towards a more conserving development path for the economy as a whole. That would, of course, open up even greater scope for energy conservation than Leach envisaged.

There are, in fact, many ways in which the search for energy efficiency necessarily brings wider patterns of activity under review. When we consider systematically the specific uses for which energy is needed in specific places - whether in a house, a factory, a district, a city, or a region - and the total system of energy provision and conservation that would meet those needs most efficiently in each particular case, we find that conventional building practices, conventional planning regulations conventional principles for operating the electricity grid, and a wide variety of other conventional ways of doing things are called into question. Any widespread use of combined heat and power, providing power for the grid and heat either for factory use or for district heating, would raise these issues.

Finally, as the efficient use of energy takes on a higher priority, during the coming years, there can be little doubt that, as in other spheres, diseconomies of scale will become more and more apparent. A "decentralised, total systems" approach will increasingly often be seen as the best way to enable users to meet their needs efficiently. One consequence may be that decisions about how the energy needs of districts, cities and regions are to be met will increasingly be determined by the contribution the various options would make to the total economic wellbeing of the districts, cities and regions concerned. Once that is accepted, we are already on a very different development path from that of the last thirty years.

The possibility is, in fact, becoming increasingly clear that countries like Britain may soon change direction to a new development path. There are at least three reasons for this. First, limits - both the physical limits evidenced by resource shortages and environmental pollution, and the social, economic and political limits evidenced by low growth, rising unemployment, inflation, and social stress - may compel us to do so. Second, increasing numbers of people may opt for quality of life rather than further increases in material

consumption. Third, for the richer countries to switch to a more conserving path of development may be their most effective way of enabling the poorer countries to develop themselves.

The practicalities of an alternative development path are now being explored in an increasing number of reports and publications. Two which came out this year have the same title, "Another Britain". One of these is a Bow Group pamphlet by Nigel Forman, MP.<sup>22</sup> The other is my report to the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA).23

Many of us who are in favour of a switch to an alternative development path see it broadly on the following lines.

- Paid and Unpaid Work. In manufacturing and services alike there will be further automation of large enterprises supplying mass-produced products and impersonal services. Many people will move into more personal work than they do at present - on small farms, in small firms, in small community enterprises, and in the provision of goods and services on a person-to-person basis. There will be more people working in their own homes and neighbourhoods than there are today; more part-time work; and a fairer distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women.
- Industry. There will be a continuing shift of emphasis towards the recovery and recycling of all kinds of materials, and methods of economising in their use; a shift towards more durable goods, therefore away production towards and from maintenance and repair; and a shift towards the manufacture of small-scale technologies and equipments for small enterprises and do-it-yourself activities.
- Food Production and Consumption. Changes in agriculture and diet will make countries like Britain more self-sufficient in indigenous types of food and less dependent on imported feeding stuffs, butter, etc. There will be less meat in the diet, more smaller farms, part-time farms, and do-it-yourself food-growing.
- Patterns of Settlement and Patterns of Living. There will be a more dispersed pattern of settlement countrywide; more people living nearer to their work; more people growing food in cities, more people manufacturing in the country, and more people providing services directly to other people in both; more people spending more active time in and around their own home

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Nigel Forman, *Another Britain*, Bow Group, London 1979.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> James Robertson, *Another Britain*, IFDA, 2 Place du Marche, CH-1260 Nyon, Switzerland, 1979.

and locality; more people with their own food plots and workshops; increasing investment by households and neighbourhoods in all kinds of equipment, including mechanical and telecommunications equipment; more living and working together by children, young people, adults, and the elderly.

• Decentralisation and Greater Self-Sufficiency. In general, there will be a shift away from centralisation towards greater autonomy and self-sufficiency at local and regional levels. In particular, localities and regions will strive to become less dependent on external sources of food and energy, recognising that such dependence drains the local "balance of payments" and that local production for local consumption creates local jobs and a healthy local economy.

The patterns of work, living, transport, production, utilisation of buildings, and decison-making implied by the changes outlined above would be likely to reduce the demand on national energy supply. The energy implications of "another Britain" clearly merit further attention.

#### Conclusions

Let me try to pull together a few threads.

First, some specific points about energy use and conservation arise. PARLIGAES might encourage action on them.

- An analysis is needed of who would stand to gain and who would stand to lose by the introduction of energy conserving measures as envisaged, for example, in the Leach Report.
- Studies are needed of how impediments to such measures could be removed or bypassed, and how potential support for them could be tapped.
- In particular, new management objectives for the energy industries, together with new policies, procedures and performance criteria, need to be worked out which will positively promote energy conservation.
- The possibility of setting up local energy corporations should be examined, on the lines of local development corporations or local enterprise trusts. Their purpose would be to help localities, organisations and households to define and meet their energy needs efficiently, and to match the end uses of energy in the locality with potentially available sources of supply. Somewhere

like Cornwall, wholly dependent now on energy brought in from outside, might be suitable as a pilot area.<sup>24</sup>

• Energy Research and Development (R&D) programmes should pay special attention, not just to renewable energy sources, but to the development of energy technologies whose social and economic effect is to enable households and localities to be more self-reliant (less wholly dependent on Big Brother) in meeting their energy needs.

Second, more generally, more attention needs to be given to future levels and patterns of energy use as they may be affected by changes in energy-using activities. Alternative futures for work; for leisure; for industry, services and agriculture; for travel; for family and neighbourhood living; for the countryside; for the inner city these are just some of the aspects of the future that will help to determine the demand for energy and the scope for conservation. It is difficult to consider alternative energy strategies seriously, without examining alternative possible futures in these other areas too. Without attempting to become a Parliamentary Liaison Group on Alternative Futures, PARLIGAES may soon have to consider widening its perspective.

personally see the growing emphasis conservation as part of a wider, general shift of emphasis from production to conservation and efficient use of resources. Moreover, I believe this is beginning to combine with the emergence of a new decentralised model of political economy (Model 6) to create a vision of a post-industrial society in which people are seen to be the most important resource - a society in which more and more people will come to feel that their self-development as members of society is the central project in their lives. In other words, I see a more conserving use of natural resources, including aspect of a people-centred post-industrial as one revolution, which will be comparable in its historical impact to the Industrial Revolution of 200 years ago.

Finally, however, I recognise that although that perception is shared by increasing numbers of people, it is not shared by many others. I recognise that many people, including people involved in energy

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> [1997 note. A Cornwall Energy Action Plan, prepared by the Cornwall Energy Project (team leader Charmian Larke) was, in fact, published in 1989 by Cornwall County Council, aimed at enabling Cornwall both to reduce its energy needs and to supply a significant proportion of them from local energy production. It was expected to lead to a reduction in the environmental impact of energy systems and provide new business and employment opportunities within the County.]

decisions, still give higher priority to increasing production than to more efficient use. I recognise that many people still operate on political economy Models 1, 2, 3, or 4. I recognise that many people are quite unconcerned about topics such as political economy and a more conserving society; as routine practitioners in a business-as-usual context, they will continue to make their decisions ad hoc as circumstances arise. I believe we shall have to keep a sense of all these different perspectives, if we want to understand how decisions about energy are likely to be reached in the coming years, and if we want to contribute effectively to those decisions ourselves.

7 St. Ann's Villas, London 1979

### **CHAPTER 4. WORK**

This chapter is the text of the Voltaire Lecture, given with the title "The Right To Responsibility In Work" on 1st November 1980, at a conference at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, England on "Human Rights And Responsibilities".

The conference was arranged jointly by the Progressive League and the British Humanist Organisation. Owing to my friendship with Peter Cadogan, then Secretary of the humanist congregation called the South Place Ethical Society, I had met a number of humanists - some very progressive, others less so! Margaret Chisman was one of the former. It was she who arranged for me to give this lecture. She is now a director of the Institute for Social Inventions.

The Voltaire Lecture was given annually or biennially for the education of the public about humanism or related aspects of scientific or philosophical thought.

January 1997

### **WORK: THE RIGHT TO BE RESPONSIBLE**

As I see it, my task this evening is threefold. I ought to say something about Voltaire's relevance for us today, since this is the Voltaire lecture. I ought to say something about rights and responsibilities, since this is the subject of your conference. And I ought to say something about work, since this is my chosen topic. I ought, also, of course, to try to weave what I have to say on those three subjects into some kind of unity, and to convey some kind of message or conclusion.

# **Voltaire's Relevance Today**

Voltaire played an important part in one of those transformative periods of history when an old order is breaking down and a new order is breaking through. He lived to see the American Revolution in 1776. He died eleven years before the French Revolution in 1789. He had helped to destroy the credibility of the old form of society dominated by the nobility and the church. He had helped to usher in a new age of science and representative democracy, of industrialism and the nation state.

We today are living in an equally transformative period. After 200 years, the age of industrialism and the nation state is coming towards an end. We are moving into a post-industrial age in which our focus will be global and local, as much as national; in which our concept of the state and the mechanisms of democracy will therefore be transformed; and in which the methods, objectives and results of supposedly objective, rational, scientific enquiry will increasingly be called in question. As the old order continues to break down, we have to prepare the ground for the new order that will take its place. We find, as Voltaire would have found had he been living now, that changes in the dominant concept of work, changes in the way work is organised and distributed, and changes in the rights and responsibilities we attach to work, will be an important feature of the transition.

Voltaire was first and foremost a demolition artist. As Thomas Paine said in *Rights of Man* (1791), Voltaire's

forte lay in exposing and ridiculing the superstitions which priestcraft, united with statecraft, had interwoven with governments. It was not from the purity of his principles or his love of mankind (for satire and philanthropy are not naturally concordant), but from his strong capacity of seeing

folly in its true shape, and his irresistible propensity to expose it, that he made these attacks. They were, however, as formidable as if the motives had been virtuous, and he merits the thanks rather than the esteem of mankind.

Paine was a little too dismissive of what he regarded as Voltaire's frivolity and, as I shall later suggest, we should not underestimate Voltaire's constructive contribution to the new thinking of the 18th century Enlightenment in France. But there can be no doubt that Voltaire's first delight, if he had been living today, would have been in satirising many of our modern superstitions.

In place of the superstitions which priestcraft, united with statecraft, had interwoven with governments, Voltaire today would have exposed and ridiculed the superstitions of economistcraft united with statecraft. He would have scorned the notion that by calculating all the costs and benefits involved in some large project, like building a new airport for London, economists, armed with the mysterious knowledge of their craft and with magical aids called computers, could work out what course of action would be best from everyone's point of view. He would have regarded it as a matter of common sense to realise that every course of action will benefit some people and harm others, and that the important question is who is to get the benefit and who is to be harmed. He would have seen that to claim otherwise is to mystify, in the hope of persuading those who are to be harmed to accept it as all for the best.1

Voltaire would also have had rare fun with some of the controversies that modern economists get involved in - for example, about the correct way to measure that metaphysical entity called the money supply, or about the relationship between inflation and unemployment. He would have found them extraordinarily reminiscent of the theological controversies which mystified people and darkened their lives in earlier times - for example, about how to measure the space occupied by angels, or about the relationship between the two natures, divine and human, of Jesus Christ.

Voltaire would surely have ridiculed our concern for Gross National Product, a man-made idol of which we have been persuaded that its size - which only economists know how to measure - is directly proportionate to the happiness of the people of the country over

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> [1997 note. Chapter 3 touched on this in regard to cost/benefit analysis applied to energy policy.]

which it presides; an idol, therefore, which has to be fed - in ways which only economists know how to specify - in order to make it as gross as possible. We get an inkling of what Voltaire might have made of the fetish of economic growth from the following passage by Hugh Stretton<sup>2</sup>. It reminds us that the significance of GNP is closely related to the superstitious reverence given by economists to paid, as contrasted with unpaid, work.

How easily we could turn the tables on the economists if we all decided that from tomorrow morning, the work of the domestic economy should be paid for. Instead of cooking dinner for her own lot, each housewife would feed her neighbours at regular restaurant rates; then they'd cook for her family and get their money back. We'd do each other's housework and gardening at award rates. Big money would change hands when we fixed each other's tap washers and electric plugs at the plumbers' and electricians' rates. Without a scrap of extra work Gross National Product (GNP) would go up by a third overnight. We would increase that to half if the children rented each other's back yards and paid each other as play supervisors, and we could double it if we all went to bed next door at regular massage parlour rates. Our economists would immediately be eager to find out what line investment was showing such fabulous growth capital/output ratio. They'd find that housing was bettered only by double beds and they'd recommend a massive switch of investment into both. Don't laugh, because in reverse, this nonsense measures exactly the distortion we get in our national accounts now.

Now Voltaire did not underestimate the significance of work. At the very end of *Candide*, for example, he puts the following statements into the mouths of his characters.

Work wards off three great evils: boredom, vice and poverty. When man was put into the garden of Eden, he was put there that he might till it, that he might work: which proves that man was not born to be idle. Let us work, then, and not argue. It is the only way to make life bearable.

We may feel that these sentiments show a somewhat negative appreciation of the value of work, but at least we may conclude from them, and from what we know of Voltaire's own life, that he regarded working as a centrally important part of living. For that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> [1997 note. I quoted this in Chapter 1, but I think it bears repetition.]

reason, if for no other, he would certainly have brought his scorn and ridicule to bear on some of our other modern superstitions about work. Imagine, for example, how scathing Voltaire would have been about the stupidity, as well as the cruelty, of any government which both propagated the harsh morality that all selfrespecting citizens should find a job for themselves and, at the same time, took measures which made certain that some millions of citizens would be unable to find one. More fundamentally, Voltaire would surely have ridiculed the idea that full employment is a hallmark of the good society. He would have exposed the shallowness of the assumption that as many people as possible should be dependent on employers to provide their life's work. What, Voltaire would surely ask, is so good about everyone becoming a wage-slave? I believe he would have seen the progressive society as one which encourages and enables a growing number of its citizens to take the right and the responsibility of defining and organising their own work for themselves, whether as individuals or in association with their fellows.

I said "progressive" society, and Voltaire believed in progress. It has been said that an optimist is someone who, like Dr. Pangloss in *Candide*, believes that we live in the best of all possible worlds, and that a pessimist is someone who fears that we do. On this definition, Voltaire was neither an optimist nor a pessimist. He did not believe that the present state of affairs was good enough, but he did believe that it could be improved. It is a view which most of us probably share.

As progressives, I believe we need to be conscious of three things. First, there are people who don't believe in progress. They are happy with the way things are; they believe in business-as-usual. Or they think things are bound to get worse; they believe in disaster. Some think that history is cyclical; they believe that things go round in circles and that there is very little any of us can do about it. We may disagree with them, but all these kinds of people are part of the situation in which progress is to be made. For practical purposes we should pay some attention to them, because they will have some effect on whether progress happens, what it turns out to be, and how it comes about. This applies to progress towards new ways of conceiving, distributing and carrying out work, just as it applies to progress in any other sphere.

Second, we progressives need to be conscious of the mainspring that underlies our notion of progress. For Voltaire and for many of his 18th century contemporaries the mainspring was the idea of Reason, and progress was progress towards an Age of Reason. Today, two centuries later, the emphasis has changed. Following scientists like Julian Huxley and mystics like Teilhard de Chardin, increasing numbers of us feel that progress is connected with the evolution of consciousness. We feel that social progress is to do with an increase in people's capacity for self-development, and we are coming to see a progressive society as one which positively enables its people and its communities to develop themselves. The mechanistic models of Newtonian science and utilitarian philosophy are losing their energising power as vehicles for the idea of progress. They are being replaced by the developmental models of biology, psychology and evolution. This affects our perception of progress in the sphere of work, as in other spheres.

Third, we progressives should have a clear idea of how progress is to be brought about. If our commitment to progress is practical, then we must see ourselves as practitioners of social change. We need to understand the dynamics of the process of social change, if we are to operate effectively on that process. In this context, Voltaire's position - Tom Paine described him as "both the flatterer and satirist of despotism" - has relevance for us. Voltaire denounced the heroic tradition in history and philosophy which, as in Machiavelli's thought, focused on the power of princes and put its trust in them. Yet he continued to hope that enlightened despots like Frederick the Great of Prussia would provide the motive force for progress into the Age of Reason. These hopes were not justified, but they were understandable. After all, what practical alternative did there seem to be in mid-18th century Europe?

We run a comparable risk. Increasingly we feel that progress requires us to throw off the domination of big corporations, big government, the mass media, the powerful trade unions, the professional monopolies (for example, in education, medicine and the law), the big money-dealers like banks and building societies - in fact, to liberate ourselves from excessive dependency on the whole complex of formal institutions which make up the over-developed, over-extended modern state. But, at the same time, we find it very difficult to imagine a different context for the reforming (or revolutionary) action which will take us forward. We assume that we need political power, or money, or publicity, or legislation, or professional backing, in order to act effectively; and we are tempted to sink our energies, as Voltaire did, in manipulating the old system in the hope of helping a new one to come to birth.

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

I now want to make three points about rights and responsibilities in general, before coming to the more specific matter of rights and responsibilities connected with work.

I said that we would be wrong to underestimate the constructive contribution which Voltaire made to the mental revolution that preceded the French Revolution. He helped to construct the new set of beliefs which replaced the old assumptions that he had done so much to demolish. And this relates directly to the first point I want to make about rights.

Voltaire's positive contribution to the Enlightenment was to interest his fellow countrymen and women in the thinking of Newton and Locke, and thus to temper the theoretical, deductive rationality of the Cartesian mind with the spirit of English empiricism. The empirical tradition in natural, moral and political philosophy led, of course, to the concepts of natural law and natural rights; and these concepts underlay not only the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 ("we hold these truths to be self-evident") but also the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens in 1789. The assumption was that rights existed as part of the natural order, and that by the use of reason we could establish what they were.

Our concept of rights today is more evolutionary. In fact, we see the evolution of rights as an aspect of the evolution of human consciousness. Rights for citizens, the right of slaves to be free, rights for women, rights for members of ethnic minorities, rights for children, rights for animals, rights even for inanimate creatures such as trees - we are now aware of a historical process whereby the treatment of various categories of people or creatures which was deemed acceptable in the past is questioned, is increasingly opposed and repudiated, and is eventually legislated against. This evolutionary nature of rights can be clearly seen in the sphere of employment over the last 150 years.

Second, there is the question of how rights and responsibilities are related. It would be too simple - and too cynical - to define rights as what we claim for ourselves and responsibilities as what we impose on other people. But there does tend to be that kind of

asymmetry between the way we think about rights and the way we think about responsibilities. This is, no doubt, due to the fact that, historically, the establishment of rights normally took place in a paternalistic context. The governed established new rights against the governors (or the governors gave new rights to the governed), and the governors accepted responsibility for safeguarding those rights. This tendency to be more concerned about our rights than our responsibilities is fostered in late industrial society by the dominant assumption that we have to look outside ourselves to society's institutions for the meeting of all our needs - to the shops for our food, to the education profession for our learning, to the doctors and the drug industry for our health, to the professional politicians for our politics, to the state for our welfare, to employers for our work. We feel that we have a right to all those things and we feel that the institutions of society have a therefore responsibility to supply them.

In *Rights of Man* Paine touched on the question of responsibilities, or duties, as follows.

While the Declaration of Rights was before the National Assembly (in Paris in 1789), some of its members remarked that, if a Declaration of Rights was published, it should be accompanied by a Declaration of Duties. The observation discovered a mind that reflected, and it only erred by not reflecting far enough. A Declaration of Rights is, by reciprocity, a Declaration of Duties also. Whatever is my right as a man, is also the right of another; and it becomes my duty to guarantee it, as well as to possess it.

According to Paine, then, it is my duty or responsibility to guarantee other people's rights - and theirs to guarantee mine. Without wishing to dispute this, we may well feel that Paine himself did not reflect far enough. There is, for example, another sense than his in which responsibilities are reciprocal to rights. Whenever one party is given rights against another, for example an employee against an employer, there are imposed on that other party responsibilities towards the first. If those responsibilities should one day prove infeasible, i.e. impossible to discharge, then the rights which created them will be infeasible too. This is all too relevant for many people in Britain today, in respect of their right to a job.

Moreover, there are two important sets of responsibilities which cannot be defined simply as the reciprocal of rights. One is people's responsibilities to themselves, and the other is responsibilities which

people take on themselves. These are perhaps hinted at, though not clearly developed, in Article 29(I) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948. This states.

Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

This is not far from the notion that people have responsibilities to themselves which no one else can fulfil. That shades into the concept of the right to be responsible. And that, I believe, is now beginning to emerge as one of the energising concepts of our time. The right to be responsible is, of course, directly related to our changing attitudes towards work and to our changing perceptions of what kinds of work are meaningful to us.

My third point follows on. It concerns the internalisation of responsibility. Young children have discipline and control imposed on them by others. As they grow up, they learn - in most cases - to discipline and control themselves. Immature organisations, like profit-making firms, have to have government regulation imposed upon them to ensure they act in socially responsible ways. As they become more mature, they recognise that they do have social responsibilities, and they internalise at least some mechanisms of social self-control. Some business thinkers today believe that big corporations, which now pursue economic goals subject to social constraints, may soon perceive their function differently - as the pursuit of socially useful purposes, subject to the constraints of economic viability and survival. As with growing-up children, and with organisations like business corporations, so with societies. An immature society is one whose members have their values and their responsibilities externally defined and imposed, for example by commercial advertisers and by agencies of government; a mature society is one whose members define their own needs and assume their own responsibilities. The consumer society plus welfare state is, in this reckoning, an immature society in a state of dependency. A more adult society will be one whose members are more selfreliant and more self-responsible.

### Work

Very different attitudes have been, and still are, found towards work. It has been seen, as Voltaire apparently saw it, as an opiate an activity that makes life bearable. It has been seen as a curse, a punishment by God for Adam's original sin. It has been seen as a blessing, enabling a person to achieve fulfilment. (This blessing idea is questioned by the people of Haiti, who have a proverb: "If work were a good thing, the rich would have found a way of keeping it for themselves"). Work has been seen as purely instrumental - an activity of no meaning or value to the worker, except insofar as it brings an income. Work has been seen as a social activity, providing a context in which people can relate to one another. Work has been seen as the central core of a person's life, which gives that life its meaning. Work has been seen as something to be avoided at almost any cost - an attitude of wellborn people in ancient Greece and Rome which is shared by people we call "skivers" and "scroungers" today. Work has been seen as something that most people have to do, but only under compulsion.

These different attitudes toward work reflect different experiences of work, different positions in society, and different cultural backgrounds. Perhaps the main contrast is between people who feel that their work ought to be important and valuable to them, and people who want to reduce to the minimum the role of work in their lives. In this context, a word is needed about the Protestant work ethic and its future.

By attaching a religious and moral value to secular work, the Protestant ethic encouraged entrepreneurs and capitalists to strive for business success, and it encouraged their employees to work for them with a will. To the former it gave moral backing in their struggle to succeed; to the latter it gave moral backing in their struggle to survive. In the ourse of time it created a situation in which what the world called work became people's main source not only of income but also of social esteem and self-esteem, more or less regardless of the value of the work itself. Today the Protestant ethic has become schizogenic: on the one hand, it makes us feel we ought to have a job - a job being the dominant form of work today; but, on the other hand, it sharpens our awareness that the work done in many jobs today is a futile waste of our time and energy, and in others positively immoral. As the shortage of jobs becomes more severe, the cookie is starting to crumble in two directions. Some people are beginning to decide that work is unimportant after

all; they will liberate themselves from the Protestant ethic and devote themselves to other things, such as their family and leisure pursuits. Others are beginning to decide that, because work is so important for them and because good work is so difficult to find in the form of jobs, they will organise their own work for themselves in some other way. These changes of attitude, though apparently opposed to one another, are not so far apart in their practical effects. Both, if they gather momentum, will help to erode the credibility and effectiveness we call the national labour market, as the main mechanism for distributing work.

This brings us to rights and responsibilities connected with work. Until fairly recently, in fact, it has not been so much a question of rights to work, as of compulsion to work. Much progress has been made in the last, say, 150 years to establish people's rights at work and - at least in theory - the equal rights to work of disadvantaged groups in society. There has also, of course, been a great advance in the rights of working people to organise themselves through trade unions.<sup>3</sup> A measure of this progress can be had by comparing the French Declaration of Rights of Man in 1789, which made no mention of rights to work, with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This declared, as Article 23:

- Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- 2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable 3. remuneration, ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- 4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

This advance in people's rights concerning employment, the growth of trade union strength, the development of industrial relations procedures and the extension of legislation to regulate employment is, of course, a huge subject. There is no doubt that these developments have helped to reduce injustice. They have certainly They were probably inevitable. been important. But they are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> [1997 note. Since 1979, in Britain and other countries, the balance of power has swung back to

some extent in favour of employers, and organised labour has lost some of its previous legal rights.]

essentially defensive. They belong to a society whose whole historical thrust for the last few hundred years has been to restrict most people's independent right to choose how they will work, and to limit their responsibility for working in accordance with their own perceptions of need and value. It is that right and that responsibility which will, I believe, be most significant for the future.

In feudal times there was the corvee - the day's unpaid work due from a vassal to his lord, which in 18th century France came to mean public labour on the roads. More generally, rents in kind (i.e. some of the fruits of their labour) were due from villeins to their manorial lords. But, as Christopher Hill<sup>4</sup> describes, when the monasteries were dissolved and many great feudal estates were broken up in 16th century England, most of the villeins became landless labourers. The enclosures of the 17th and 18th centuries, which involved the loss of rights to graze cattle, pick up timber, and hunt animals on the common lands, increased their dependence on In fact, enclosure of the commons was positively praised by contemporaries because it forced labourers "to work every day in the year; their children will be put out to labour early". By depriving the lower orders of any chance of economic independence, "the subordination of the lower ranks of society would be thereby considerably secured". Harsh penalties were imposed on the workless poor under the Poor Law from the 16th century, and harsh restrictions on labour mobility under laws such as the great Statute of Artificers of 1563. These made doubly sure that people who had no property would have no escape route from a semi-servile state and their "duty to work for their betters", and that a pool of cheap labour would always be available for employers.

The coming of the factory system brought a further deprivation of independence at work. E.P. Thompson describes its impact on the life of weavers.

Weaving had offered an employment to the whole family, even when spinning was withdrawn from the home. The young children winding bobbins, older children watching for faults, picking over the cloth, or helping to throw the shuttle in the broad-loom; adolescents working a second or third loom; the wife taking a turn at weaving in and among her domestic employments. The family was together, and however poor

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Christopher Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution*, Penguin, 1969. See especially pp.57 and 270.

meals were, at least they could sit down at chosen times. A whole pattern of family and community life had grown up around the loom-shops; work did not prevent conversation or singing. The spinning-mills - which offered employment only for their children - and then the power-loom shed which generally employed only the wives or adolescents - were resisted until poverty broke down all defences.<sup>5</sup>

Most people today, nearly 200 years later, are conditioned to take for granted that work has little connection with any pattern of family and community life. It has not occurred to many of us until quite recently that men as well as women might have a right, or perhaps even feel a responsibility, to work directly for and in our families and communities. The pressures pushing people towards employment unconnected with family or community have been very strong. They include: the reduction in the number of small firms and small farms; the inflation of property prices, making it difficult for most people to buy land; personnel management procedures which discourage part-time employment; pension practices which discourage early retirement from employment; social security procedures which encourage unemployed people (including, for example, single parents) to seek employment; and trade union pressures which seek to reserve work for full-time employees. Only in the last few years, as the prospects of restoring and maintaining permanent full employment have become bleaker, have attempts been made to proclaim new rights in respect of work - such as the right to work in socially useful ways, 6 the right to useful unemployment<sup>7</sup>, and the right to leisure.<sup>8</sup>

However, I believe we may now be near a turning point. It is becoming apparent that full employment was a transient phenomenon belonging uniquely to that period of 25 years or so after the second world war which marked the climax of the industrial age. In the last few years, as the national labour market has begun to break down and lose its credibility as a mechanism for distributing society's work, more and more people have begun to think about what "post-industrial" arrangements may take its place.

<sup>8</sup> A right to expanded and egular leisure was proposed by Clive Jenkins and Barry Sherman, *The Collapse of Work*, Eyre Methuen, 1979.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, 1968. See p.339.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> [1997 note. For the Lucas Aerospace Shopstewards Combine Committee's campaign to work on socially useful products, see Chapter 3, footnote 5.]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ivan Illich, *The Right to Useful Unemployment*, Marion Boyars, 1978.

A widening range of practical initiatives and projects have been launched which create new contexts for work.

The following changes are likely to be among the most important. Together they could combine to ease the unemployment problem very significantly. The key is that they help to provide solutions to today's employment problems which are also stepping stones to new patterns of work for the future.

First, the revival of local economies is now a top priority in many parts of the industrialised world. Large numbers of local communities and towns are threatened by the decline of industries (like steel or ship-building or textiles or nickel-mining or railways or motor-manufacturing) on which they have become dependent for employment. As central governments and national and multi-national employers prove less and less willing and able to bail them out, people living in these places are realising that the revival of local economies and of local employment is something that will have to be initiated locally if it is going to happen at all. They are starting to explore the scope for providing more local work by meeting more of their own basic needs locally, for example by growing more of their food and by substituting local energy sources for imports of electricity and other forms of fuel and power from elsewhere. Not only in this country but also in places like Sudbury in Canada and Jamestown in the United States, local enterprise trusts, citizens' groups, community enterprises, ownerships, co-operatives, county energy plans and other local initiatives are now springing up, and local centres of knowledge and skill (like colleges) and local associations (like trades councils and chambers of commerce) are beginning to get into the act. 9

Second, not just the locality but also the household may once again become an important centre for production and work, as it was before the industrial age drove work out of the home into factories and offices and other institutions like hospitals and schools. Miniaturised technology - including the microprocessor and other electronic technology such as micro-computers, video terminals and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> [1997 note. Interest in local economic regeneration and self-reliance has continued to grow throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It has been reflected in transnational programmes under the auspices of the European Commission and the OECD. (David Cadman and I did a study on finance for local employment initiatives for both those organisations in 1984/85.) But economic policy-makers and commentators have continued to see local economies as peripheral to mainstream economic issues. Richard Douthwaite, *Short Circuit:Strengthening Local Economies for Security in an Unstable World,* Green Books, 1996, is a good practical guide for local communities which can no longer rely on the global and national economy to provide the necessities of life.]

word-processors - will make it possible to do at home much of the work now done in factories and offices. People who handle information, like computer programmers and insurance salespeople, are moving in this direction already. At the same time, increasing numbers of people are already spending more time on DIY (do-ityourself) and other informal kinds of work for themselves, their families, and their friends and neighbours. Food growing is one Car maintenance, plumbing, electrical work, carpentry and various aspects of home maintenance are others. Moonlighting, legal and illegal, is on the increase. As this continues, and as arrangements for exchanging skills and services with neighbours outside the formal labour market continue to spread, this will stimulate the further growth of productive work in and around the home.

Third, our changing attitudes to men's work and women's work may be especially significant. As the industrial way of life developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, men's work and women's work diverged and the split between them became more marked. The father became the breadwinner going out to work for money, while the mother became the housewife staying at home. industrialised society increased the importance of money in people's lives, the paid work of men acquired a higher status than the unpaid work of women - although women's work was always more closely concerned with basic human needs. This led to the women's movement insistina that woman should have more employment rights with men, and women now have a fairer deal so far as paid work is concerned. But progress has been lop-sided, and men do not yet undertake their fair share of the unpaid work of running the household and raising the family. But they are becoming aware that they tend to miss out on these convivial, familial, neighbourly aspects of life. This could be a crucial trigger for change. Men's attitudes to work could alter sooner than many people think, under growing pressure from their women-folk, a growing shortage of full-time jobs, and a growing sense that much men's work in factories, offices and the professions is socially useless and personally arid.

This would contribute, fourth, to a rapidly spreading demand for part-time jobs among men as well as women. Opening up new opportunities for part-time jobs would enable more people, regardless of their sex, both to earn an income and to have more time to spend on voluntary work, family-raising, and DIY in and around their homes. Job-sharing, longer holidays, shorter working

hours, and earlier retirement could merge with part-time jobs to provide a wider variety of working patterns from which people could choose the way of working that suits them best. For some people a part-time job could provide a stepping stone to self-employment. In all these ways the spread of part-time jobs could help to leave more jobs and employment opportunities available for the many people (including young people and handicapped people) whose claim to be provided with a job is particularly strong, because they cannot reasonably be expected to organise work for themselves.

#### Conclusion

Let me now try to draw the threads together.

First, then, we are living, as Voltaire was living, at a time when a transformation of our society cannot be far off. Its dominant institutions have become absurdly overdeveloped, and we have become absurdly dependent on them. In no aspect of our lives is this more significant than in the sphere of work.

Secondly, we are living through a time when progress in establishing many new rights has, paradoxically, diminished our effective right to take responsibility for ourselves. As the institutions of modern society, such as the national labour market, become less able to deliver the goods we require of them, such as jobs, we shall find it necessary to take more responsibility to ourselves.

Thirdly, for several hundred years forces have been strongly at work in our society which have tended to deprive most people of an effective right to define for themselves, in accordance with their own needs and values, how they should use (and develop) their own capacity for work. One of the most exciting possibilities now confronting us is of a change of direction in this respect.

As and when we bring this change about (and we will have to take the initiative ourselves, not try to get the government and other institutions to do it for us), we shall open up the prospect of good work for many more people than have enjoyed it in the past. By "good work" I mean what E.F. Schumacher meant. 10 First, it is work that provides necessary goods and services; it meets needs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> E.F.Schumacher, *Good Work*, Cape, 1979.

Second, it is work that enables people to use and develop their abilities and aptitudes and experience; it contributes to human growth. Third, it is work done in service to and in co-operation with other people, thus liberating us from the limits of egocentricity; it contributes to the growth of people as social beings.

Good work, in short, contributes to self-development and the evolution of consciousness. Henceforth good work will be an essential part of progress. It requires that we claim and exercise the right to be responsible.

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