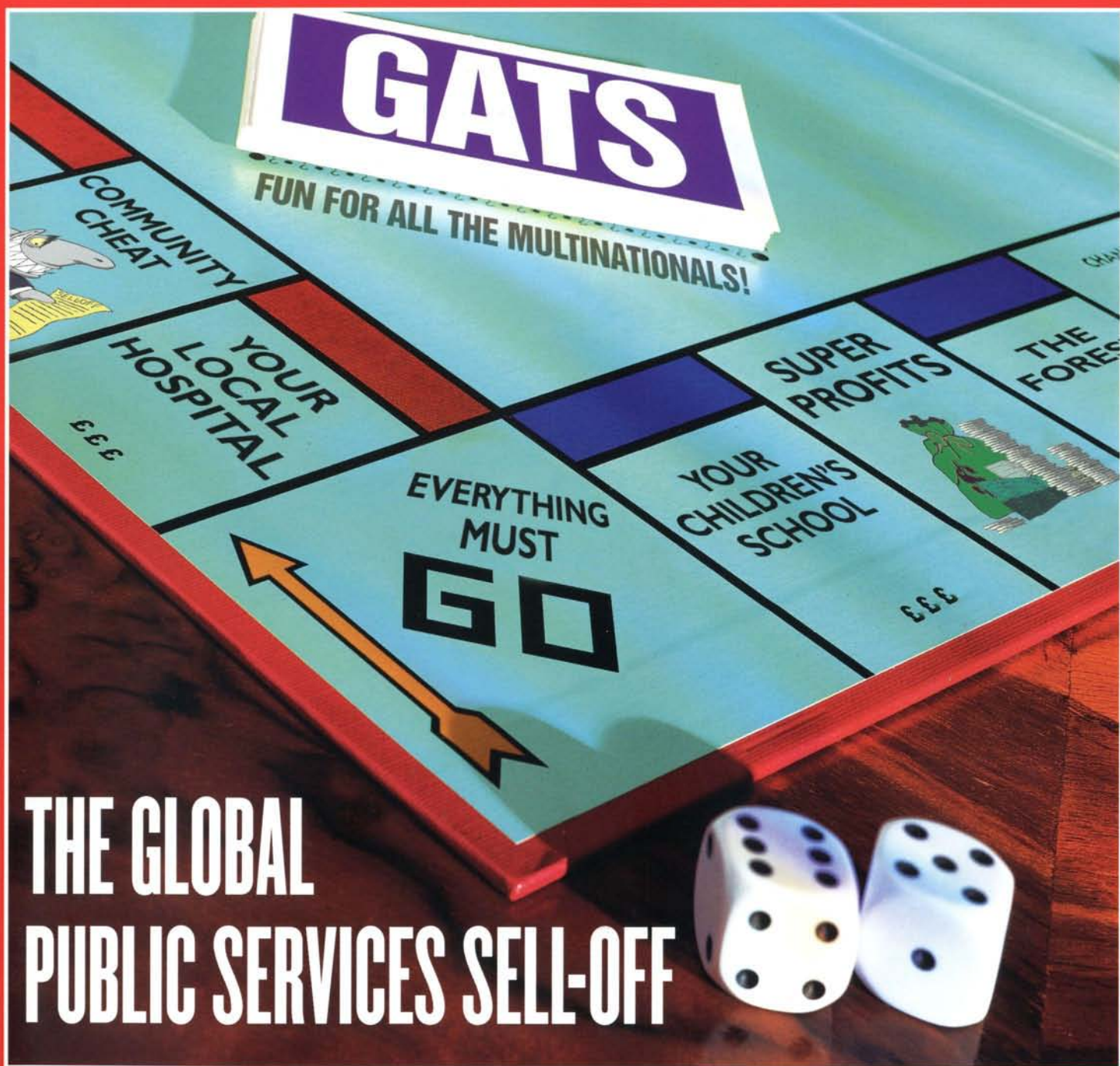


# THE Ecologist

VOLUME 31 NO 1 £3.50

RETHINKING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

FEBRUARY 2001



## THE GLOBAL PUBLIC SERVICES SELL-OFF

**THE GREEN MAN**  
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with Ralph Nader

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Who's behind the  
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**IT'S OFFICIAL**  
Big dams really  
ARE bad news



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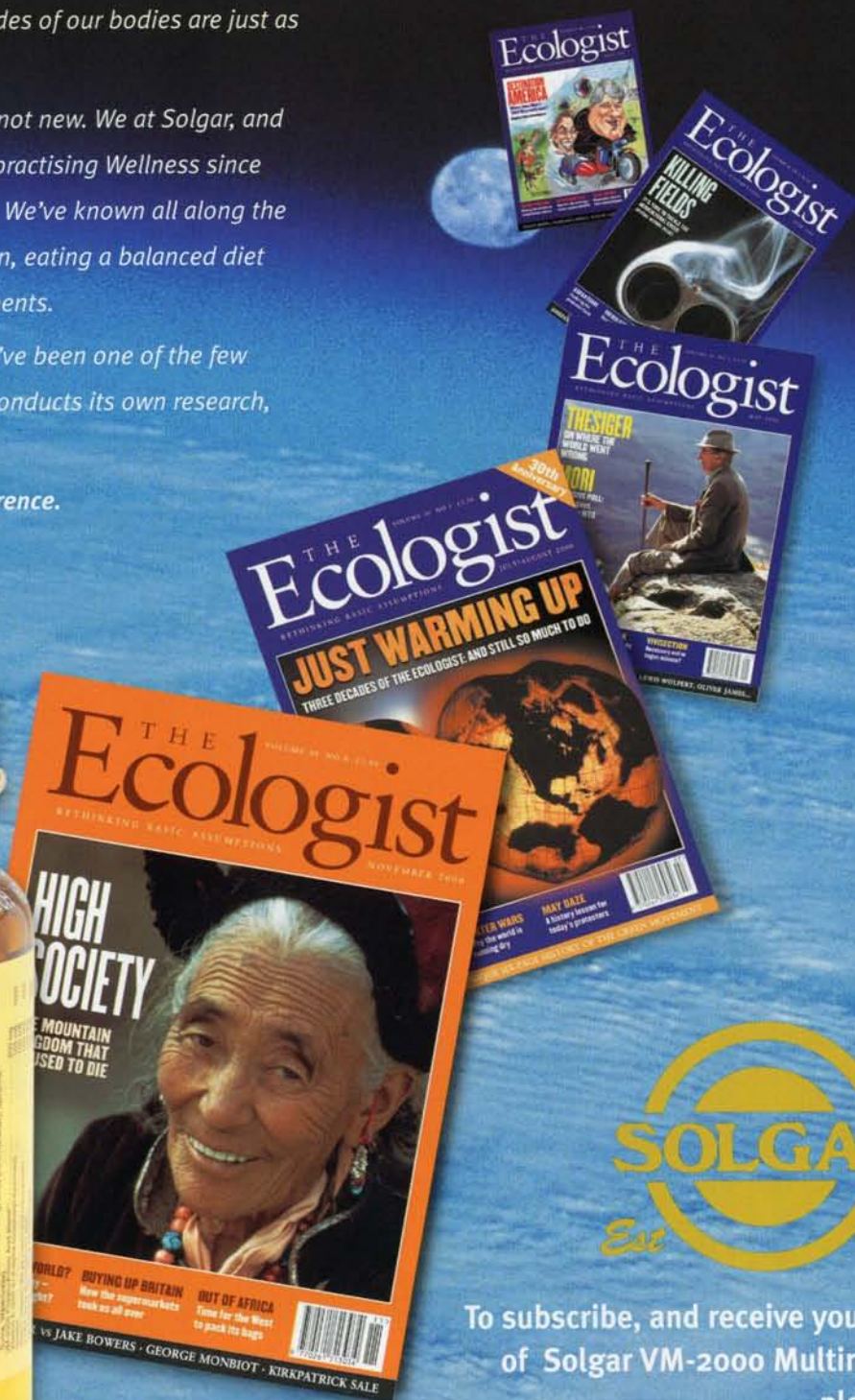
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# STUNG BY THE EXPERTS

**T**here once was a scorpion, so went one of the great fables of Aesop. It found itself on the edge of a gushing river, one that no scorpion could ever hope to cross. As it was pondering the situation a frog appeared, and with it, an idea. 'Frog', asked the scorpion, 'will you ferry me across these waters upon your back?' 'That would be madness,' answered the frog. 'You are a dangerous scorpion, and I a vulnerable frog. Why would I take such a risk?' 'No risk', assured the scorpion. 'If I sting you, I too will drown.' And so the frog agreed. Halfway across the river's width, the frog suddenly felt a spasm of pain. 'Why?' he cried out. 'Because it is my nature to sting', answered the scorpion.

Aesop might well have written something similar of the culture of expertise that now dominates modern society. For just as it was the nature of Aesop's scorpion to sting, so is it the nature of experts to be wrong on almost every issue they address. For there is no creature, human or otherwise, so determined and capable of missing what is obviously the truth.

And so it was that when the Royal College of Psychiatrists was commissioned to determine the causes of higher suicide rates among British farmers, they concluded that shotgun licences were to blame. And when the French media wondered, following the Chernobyl disaster, what the effect would be in France, they were told by government experts that the radiation had obediently stopped at the border.

Whatever the puzzle thrown at official experts, they always manage to get it wrong. Following the death from E.coli of a Lancashire resident, EU experts had a field day imposing massive hygiene regulations on all abattoirs. And while thousands of traditional abattoirs bit the bullet, the experts had conveniently failed to notice that the guilty meat had been prepared for a fast food chain by an abattoir that was already fully compliant with EU hygiene standards.

The role of the experts on the whole is to provide reliable advice for the common good. And from a very early age, we are taught to trust them. But there is very little in the way of track record to suggest we are justified in our faith in the expert system.

Indeed virtually every product whose name has become synonymous with corporate misdeed, was itself at one time given the thumbs up by the most senior experts of the day. 'There is still no positive proof,' wrote the Director of Merrill Company in 1961, 'of a causal relation between the use of thalidomide during pregnancy and malformations in the new-born.'

Today, one of the world's most prestigious cancer charities, Imperial Cancer, still maintains that 'one of the biggest myths in recent years is that there is a cancer epidemic caused by exposure to radiation,

pollution, pesticides and food additives.' This, despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

The trouble is, even when the experts do catch up with common sense people, it is often too late. For instance, 25 years ago saw the publication of *The Ecologist's Blueprint for Survival*. In it, warnings were issued about our effects on the global climate. It has taken that time for the world's leading climatologists, many of whom dismissed our claims, to reach more or less the same conclusions.

And even then, if the conclusions reached by experts are potentially harmful to industry, the regulators invariably ignore them. Take biotech for example. The package presented by government officials was one of general neatness and safety. When critics pointed out that even sand, let alone pollen, could be carried by winds for many hundreds of miles, the government ploughed ahead regardless. When finally proof emerged that GM crops were cross-pollinating with non-GM crops, the government simply issued a statement via Baroness Hayman that 'producers will have to find a way of dealing with contamination from other crops'.

Where occasionally an honest expert confronts us, it is usually a heavily under-funded one, and he is inevitably clearing the mess of expert predecessors. And because such an expert must question the interests of big business, he will be demonised. This was certainly the case with Professor Pusztai, who quickly learned that honest science, particularly that which threatens big business, does not pay.

The sort of science used by government and big business can prove anything and everything. This is why while very nearly 100 per cent of independent studies into the safety of the sweetener Aspartame highlight potential dangers, including cancer and other forms of degenerative disease, exactly 100 per cent of government- and industry-backed studies into the same substance 'confirm' its safety. This is why tobacco executives can still swear under oath that tobacco is not addictive.

It is the nature of the experts, trained as they are, to see the world in artificial terms. Thus, in the rare instance of a new chemical actually being tested, it will be in laboratory conditions, absolutely isolated both from other chemicals it will inevitably contact and react with, and from the living world that will bear the brunt of its effects. Experts, in virtuality every field, are trained only to see parts.

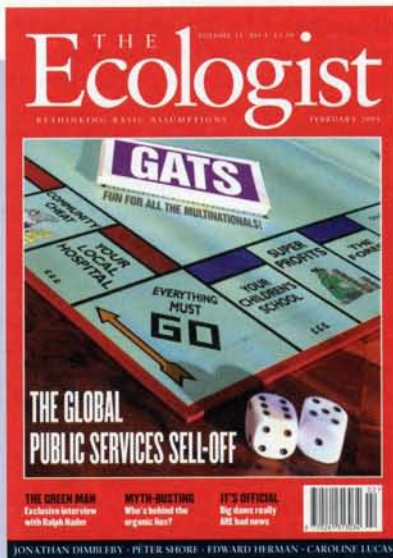
Until we learn to rely on common sense, which has never failed to triumph over the tyranny of the experts, the solution to climate change will always be millions of tonnes of iron hurled into the oceans, rather than a correction of conditions that lead to climate change, the solution to water pollution will always be genetically modified pollution-detecting rainbow fish. It is up to us to seize control from the experts and to recognise the wholeness of our world.

ZAC GOLDSMITH



# THE Ecologist *contents*

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## COVER STORY

Heard of GATS? Not many people have. Yet while the world has been dealing with the WTO and the more obvious forms of global corporatisation, GATS has been stealthily laying out its game plan, and quietly establishing a new, irrevocable status quo. GATS is the Global Agreement on Trade in Services, and if it goes through, public services around the world will never be the same again. Put simply, GATS will allow corporations to take over the world's public services – whether people want it or not. Education, healthcare, social services, postal services, water supply, museums, libraries: all will be up for corporate grabs if we don't stop GATS.

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(With apologies to Monopoly)

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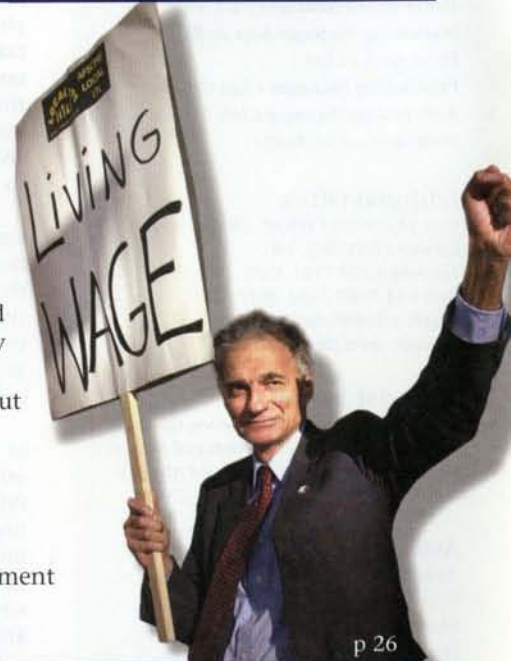


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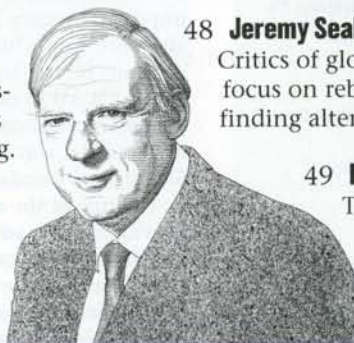


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Please attach your name and postal address, even when sending by email. The editor reserves the right to shorten or edit correspondence where necessary.

## A 'BULL' MARKET

I refer to the short article on the Campaigns page of *The Ecologist* (Vol 30 No 6) 'Three Mile Jimmy' regarding the scandal of the cover-up of the true extent of the health risk after the nuclear explosion at Three Mile Island. It would appear, then, that the hiding of facts from the public, in case economic growth/the growth of power is affected, is endemic in the corridors of power.

Recently we have been hearing in various news reports that the scientific establishment in this country is seriously researching the various 'clusters' of human variant CJD victims across the country like those in Stockport and Leicestershire, to try to identify a common causal link with regard, perhaps, to a particular chain of supply of beef products in these areas. If established, of course, this is likely to have an economic affect on the sale/export of beef products.

Why then, are the more common 'clusters' of cancer/leukaemia victims surrounding each and every nuclear power plant/facility both in this country and abroad not given the same serious attention by the scientific establishment regarding the carcinogenic emissions from such nuclear facilities?

Could the reason be economic once again, ie that while there is an ever-increasing number of cancer victims, international drug companies rejoice at their mounting profits from the sale of their anti-cancer drugs and so the mighty treadmill of economic growth grinds at an ever faster rate? If so, it is surely no wonder that while still in a climate of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD) created by the mutually-supportive nuclear power and nuclear weapons industries, (note the increasing production of depleted uranium weapons from the waste products of enriched uranium, for example), no MAD scientist or MAD politician can stomach the possibility of jumping off this treadmill!

The trouble is, of course, in the light of 'clusters' of CJD victims, such scientists and politicians run an ever increasing risk of being seen by the public to be 'falling over their feet' and stumbling about 'mooing' in the mud if they do not!

JOY PAGANO *Cheshire, UK*

## AN ILL WIND?

When I read (Vol 30 No 9) that 'in 1998, Hurricane Georges caused \$3.3 billion damage in the United States,' a number of questions occurred to me that always go through my head when I come across statistics of this sort. Frinstance: How are these figures arrived at? And by whom? And, even more puzzling: How are they arrived at so quickly? Birmingham (for example) only has to be wiped off the map by a tidal wave at 11.59 and at 12 o'clock the news-readers are telling us that damage is 'estimated' at two hundred and sixty-eight million pounds and 13 pence. How do they do that?

These are teasing questions. And one other thing I should like to know: Why

instead of saying 'caused \$3.3 billion damage', did the author of the article not write, 'brought a \$3.3 billion cash injection into the local economy'? After all, this money is – presumably – paid out to real people for doing real work (carpenters, builders, electricians, bricklayers...). Furthermore, it's coming out of the liquid assets of insurance companies in whose hands all it's ever going to do is slosh about the world's money markets doing nothing useful whatever. I don't want to belittle the distress of the people who were on the receiving end of all this expensive damage, but it's an ill wind, no?

ROGER JONES *Andover, UK*

## ONLY JK-ING

In his recent letter (Vol 30 No 7), David Edwards repeats an increasingly oft-cited myth about the modern corporation: that its reason for being is the maximisation of profits. In reality, as was so proficiently analysed by J K Galbraith in his 1967 book, *The New Industrial State*, what is maximised by the modern corporation is not profits but success as an organisation. At first glance, it may seem that the latter is merely another name for the former, but the view that emerges from Galbraith's debunking is perhaps even more troubling than if the economic myth were true. The safety of the corporate technostructure, the compelling need to survive is and must be the primary goal, and results in a policy of Everlasting Expansion, 'to achieve the greatest possible rate of corporate growth as measured in sales'. (p171) Galbraith's ensuing analysis and cited examples leave no doubt that profit maximisation is overruled or ignored at every instance where it does not accord with the growth and security paradigm.

PETER WEBSTER *Puget-Theniers, France*

## BRECON BEATEN?

I am completely in agreement with George Monbiot's sentiments in his article 'Brecon Reckoning' (Vol 30 No 9).

It is sad to see a town such as Brecon devastated by the building of a large super-

market in the town centre. But we must remember that, even after the store is built, the choice is still in our hands. No one forces us to shop in the new store. I understand the local geography in Brecon is going to be changed to make it less convenient to access the existing stores. But a local boycott, supporting our traditional stores, is the only way to show town councils and the supermarket chains all over the UK that they cannot continue to ignore the wishes of the local population.

Supermarkets with no customers, even those owned by national chains, won't stay open very long.

Then maybe we could knock them down and build something useful in the town centres. It is up to us all to make a stand and vote with our feet, before we have no small local shops left.

NIGEL RUMSEY *Gravesend, Kent*

## RUNNING OUT

To quote: 'it is looking like we are reaching the end of cheap energy/oil in the coming decade. Recent high oil prices can be construed as being the early signs of inability to match demand with supply, i.e. the production peak of oil is approaching ([www.net-ibaraki.ne.jp/aboys/](http://www.net-ibaraki.ne.jp/aboys/))'.

Climate change? Globalisation? Solved! Massive hardship to the CO<sub>2</sub> producers introduced!

RICHARD WILCOX *Tokyo, Japan*

## LOVE LOST FOR LOVELOCK

I'm a bit unhappy about your 'Good Guy', James Lovelock, (Vol 30 No 9). Hasn't he just blotted his copybook in his dotage by coming out in favour of nuclear power? His excuse is probably that super-red-herring that 'bad' Richard North ought to go after, but probably doesn't: Global Warming.

I continue to be amazed at how something so obviously a ploy of the nuclear lobby has continued to divert the whole 'Green' movement from much more serious issues.

Please can *The Ecologist* start a serious debate over the simplistic nonsense of carbon dioxide and climate change by looking at Nigel Calder's book, *The Manic Sun*, which puts a much more convincing explanation for climate change than all the stuff from the bandwagon of climate scientists. Basically, it's the clouds, stupid – to paraphrase an ancient political slogan.

ROGER FRANKLIN *Stroud, UK*

## THE WORST OF TIMES

The title of the first of your new series profiling the heroes and villains of our time, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' (Vol 30 No 8), refers to Ralph Nader, George W Bush and *The New York Times*, respectively.

You quote *The New York Times*: 'Given the major differences between the prospective Democratic and Republican nominees, there is no driving logic for third-party candidacy this year, and the public deserves to see the major-party candidates compete on an uncluttered playing field.'

The slogan on the masthead of *The New York Times* reads: 'All the news that's fit to print'. However, some people who are *au fait* with that newspaper of record claim that its editorial policy would be better described by the slogan: 'All the news that fits'.

MYLES CROWE *Co. Cork, Ireland*

## INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION AND CANCER

The answers to the cancer epidemic are clear cut. Carcinogens are the cause of cancer. If carcinogens are present in food or in the air we breathe, they will increase the risk of cancer. If we handle materials that are carcinogenic then we will also increase the risk of cancer.

Unfortunately some of the food we eat does contain trace carcinogens. Much of the dairy produce in Britain has trace levels of dioxin, affecting milk, meat, cheese and other dairy products. The air we breathe, particularly if we live in an industrial area, or close to a source of toxic pollution; power stations, radioactive processing, chemical plants, incinerators, waste tips, coke and steel works, etc, will be a source of carcinogenic chemicals. Cigarettes contain

at least 23 carcinogenic trace elements. However lung cancer registrations for North Derbyshire between 1991 to 1995 show that the numbers of cases in the agricultural west are only half that of the industrial east. The North Derbyshire Health Authority explains this by stating that this means that there must be twice the number of smokers in the east, and not that industrial pollution is heavier in the east. Industrial pollution is the main cause of cancer and by 2005 one in every two people will die from cancer.

The immune system protects us to a limited degree from carcinogens. Fresh fruit and vegetables eaten as the whole food, and not processed, provide the body with the essential vitamins to keep the immune system topped up. Antioxidants taken as a vitamin supplement eg vitamins A, C and E, and selenium, provide some protection but are not as effective as whole fruit, vegetables and nuts. Eating fibre helps to ensure regularity in disposing of food laced with pesticides rather than laying in the bowel. Drinking fully skimmed milk reduces the intake of dioxins in milk fat, and eating organic foods reduces pesticide intake.

Deprivation and food are therefore not the cause of cancer as stated by the health authorities. Rather it is living in a polluted area, eating foods contaminated with pesticides and dioxins, and not eating sufficient non-contaminated fruit and vegetables.

There are no hidden facts here. The problem can be remedied and the reasons are well known. The cancer institutes will not investigate the causes, because they are multi-million pound businesses, dependent on the cancer epidemic not declining. The asthma research groups will not investigate industrial air pollution.

Traffic pollution in Britain according to

government statistics relates to only 26 per cent of the total air pollution levels and, of this 26 per cent, the majority is diesel emissions from HGVs and public transport buses and coaches. The 51 per cent produced by industry and the 23 per cent from open-casting and quarrying are never questioned.

The answers are simple but far-reaching. The government must set new standards for chemical pollutants in line with current known health risks. They must instigate more national air-pollution monitoring at PM2.5 so that they can detect particulates that are really causing health damage and must identify the polluters and make them reduce pollution levels. Stringent controls must be enforced to dramatically reduce the quantities of pesticides used in food production. Background levels of dioxins and PCBs must be reduced from the heavy polluters so that British dairy products are once again safe. Waste tips and incinerators must be located away from residential areas. The FSA must be seen to be protecting the public and the Environmental Agency stopping the imports of toxic hazardous waste from abroad. The Government should promote more research into the causes of cancer and the cancer institutes made to research causes rather than cures. The burning of synthetic car tyre chips should be investigated as to the levels of butadiene emissions to air produced and the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns and on the railways investigated, which cause major pollution episodes. The levels of air pollution produced by air traffic should be carefully assessed and non-polluting fuels developed.

So let's not talk about unknown causes of cancer when clearly, many facts about causes are known.

JOHN GOWER *Sheffield, UK*

## JUST A QUICK WORD...

### THE BIG PICTURE

How horrifying to know that our environment keeps deteriorating each day. It almost seems there is nothing to correct the major problems to our Ecosystem. Problems that man has caused.

But instead of simple quick answers, our world leaders must take the time to analyse the big picture to come up with a step-by-step big plan to rectify our errors.

PAUL DALE ROBERTS *California, US*

### A VIDAL POINT?

I read John Vidal's comments on the media (Vol 30 No 9) with mixed feelings: while it is refreshing to see such honesty from a mainstream commentator, it is troubling precisely because it is so refreshing!

Why, given that he feels so passionately about the media's collusion in 'systemic corruption', has Vidal never explored the structural causes and consequences of this collusion where it really matters: in *The Guardian*?

DAVID EDWARDS *Bournemouth, UK*



## THE SPOILS OF OIL

**BP is 'creating jobs' – and climate change – by opening up new oil fields.**

There are many things a company can do to gain good PR, and one of the favourite stand-bys is apparent job creation, which is precisely what BP has embarked upon. Government employment figures, compliant journalists and even the public might start to believe that the vast profits made by the company are being used for 'investing in people'.

So the government has given the 'go-ahead' for a £320 million BP-led project which, via a new pipeline will take surplus gas from the Foinaven and Schiehallion oil fields in the North Sea to the Magnus oil field where it will be used to flush an extra 50m barrels of oil.

This allowed the British Trade and Industry Secretary Steven Byers to announce 2,500 new BP jobs just days after General Motors had announced the closure of its Vauxhall plant at Luton with the loss of 2,200 jobs. Minus 2,200 plus 2,500 equals plus 300. Government is 'creating jobs' again: at the expense, of course, of the climate.

Meanwhile, BP and partners are also investing a hefty £210 million to access a further £85m-worth of oil in the Foinaven field.

The announcement also included a go-ahead for Ranger Oil to further develop one of its oil fields in the central North Sea and the development of the Leadon oilfield, operated by Kerr-McGee North Sea. The total investment of £1 billion has been termed by Byers 'the biggest the North Sea has seen in years'.

That's a lot of barrels being produced for a company that claims to have gone 'beyond petroleum'.

TITLE: BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY



### A monthly roundup of George W Bush's recent words of wisdom

"I say things because I believe them"

# D'OHBYA!

## OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

**Banning the feeding of animal remains to farm animals is forcing farmers to feed them on imported soya – much of which is genetically modified.**

The good news: from 1 January 2001, for six months at least, is that 'the feeding of processed animal proteins to farmed animals which are kept, fattened or bred for the production of food' has been banned by the EU Commission. The bad news: instead of charging the feed companies responsible for the development of BSE for this, the EU charges the taxpayers for the cost of implementing it. The worse news: right now, amazingly, there isn't actually enough grass or grain left in Europe to feed all the animals that are now banned from eating each other.

As a result, global prices for soymeal, rape seed and sunflower seed have been jumping. On 27 November, based solely on the speculation that Germany might ban meat-and-bone meal (MBM) in animal feed, prices for soymeal as a replacement jumped as much as 6 per cent on the European feed market. According to traders, demand for Argentine soymeal pellets for November delivery forced the price up from \$12 to \$126 per tonne. Put into perspective, a German MBM ban alone would create the need for about 600,000 extra tonnes of soymeal. According to the EU Animal Feed Manufacturers Association (FEFAC) the EU ban means an extra 3 to 3.5 million tonnes of soymeal will be needed by its farmers.

Good news, for companies like Monsanto, that is – for whom the ban couldn't have come at a better time. With its Roundup Ready corn, soybeans and canola, Monsanto's heavy investment in agriculture is now paying off. For the past month, its shares have steadily been climbing, peaking in December.

Worst news of all for the rest of us: EU Farm Commissioner Franz Fischler has

rejected calls by environmentalists to put a ceiling on soybean imports. He knows there is little else to feed European animals on right now.

The scenario consequently unfolding was best exemplified last December when Greenpeace activists unearthed vast imports of GM soy from the US into Europe, the majority destined for animal feed. Greenpeace estimates that thousands of unlabelled tons of the stuff are currently coming in all the time, and being fed, on the sly, to livestock destined for supermarket shelves.

The hard truth is that, in order to sustain the ban on meat and bonemeal, European countries will have to import replacements from countries like Canada, the US and Argentina where a considerable amount of crops used for animal feed are genetically modified. For consumers this raises serious questions. What happens to meat-eaters who don't want GM food? They have to lump it. If Europe's politicians, food retailers and manufacturers aren't asked hard questions about this very soon, GM animal feed could become a way of life. So much for consumer choice.

Worse still, European dependency on imports has been augmented by policies such as the Blair House Agreement, which guarantees US oilseed export markets to the EU, limits EU production and even penalises overproduction of rape seed, sunflower seed and soybeans.

Revolutionary changes are needed in the mechanisms that control the food chain. Changing the CAP subsidy regime in order to promote self-sufficiency in EU agriculture production and to reduce reliance on imports, whilst enforcing the precautionary approach towards GMO's, have to be basic 'musts'.

See [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org) and [www.cpe-farmers.org](http://www.cpe-farmers.org) for more on this hot topic.

'Natural gas is hemispheric. I like to call it hemispheric in nature because it is a product that we can find in our neighbourhoods.'  
December 20, 2000

'They underestimated me.'  
November 6, 2000

'I will have a foreign-handed foreign policy.'  
September 27, 2000

'Well, I think if you say you're going to do something and don't do it, that's trustworthiness.'  
August 30 2000

## BANNED AIDS

**Who cares about Africa's AIDS epidemic? Not the drugs companies – there's no money in it.**

Twenty-five million African people are infected with AIDS. Fewer than 25,000 – one-tenth of 1 per cent – receive therapy that could avert or slow their deaths. If this scenario continues, African life expectancy over the coming decade will actually drop below 30 years, and the number of AIDS deaths in Africa could hit 60 million.

The global AIDS division – rich victims live, poor ones die – apparently disturbed the five major pharmaceutical companies so much that last May they pledged to help.

Merck, Hoffmann-La Roche, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Glaxo Wellcome and Boehringer Ingelheim pledged, in a promise



which made front page news, to work to make AIDS medicines available to the poor.

But according to the *Washington Post*, nothing has changed since then. This is not surprising. Company projections call for a production increase to cover thousands – not millions – of African AIDS patients. With four-fifths of all pharmaceutical revenue coming from just seven countries in North America, Europe and Japan, all of Africa represents just 1 per cent. No profits there.

Why can't they just cut the price of

AIDS medicines for the poor of Africa? After all, lost profits from price cuts would be equal to just three days' worth of exchange rate fluctuations. Well, if cheaper prices in Africa effected downward pressure on the global price, then the profits of the pharmaceutical industry would be at risk – a risk none of them are willing to take. All the while, their rate of return on assets is the highest in any industry.

So, although even the World Bank's president says that 'the AIDS epidemic, particularly in Africa... makes action... more crucial by the day', the Bank itself regards

anti-retroviral drugs as 'cost-ineffective' in the Third World and discourages their purchase. 'Like most things in the world, it comes down to money, and nobody has been willing to commit

money to this,' says Jeffrey Sachs, who chairs a WHO advisory commission on macroeconomics and health.

No matter that 'global AIDS prevention and care will fail if only the rich have access to drugs and an eventual vaccine', according to Jonathan Mann, a previous director of the WHO AIDS programme. No matter, because 'AIDS drugs' says Paul DeLay from the US Agency for International Development 'are something that right now can't be offered to the mass of humanity'.

Touch luck Africa.

## FISHY FACTS

**What's killing Scotland's rivers and lochs?**

The Scottish Executive debated a bill aimed at tackling the crisis in Scotland's wild salmon stocks, whose number has declined by 40 per cent since 1998. Accepting that the link between sea lice infestation spreading from fish farms and the decline in wild salmon has been established 'beyond reasonable doubt', the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) concluded that this was all the more reason why salmon farmers should be allowed to use chemicals to treat their livestock. In order to back this conclusion,

the SEPA is currently pressing Trow Aquaculture, the manufacturer of a licensed but controversial anti-sea-lice chemical, to prove that their product is safe. The chemical, marketed under the name Calicide, acts by preventing the formation of chitin, a key component of the sea-louse's exoskeleton, but also important in the life cycles of scallops, mussels and lobsters. A scallop farmer from Skye was denied access to the scientific evidence that led SEPA to accept Calicide as safe. He was told that Trow's commercial interests overrode the need for openness.

## NOTES & QUOTES

*'The [biotech] industry has no interest whatsoever in projects for developing countries.'*

Heinz Saedler, director of the molecular plant genetics department at the Max Planck Institute

*'Mr Prescott is pretending to be a generous Santa Claus, but in reality he is a Scrooge.'*

Bernhard Jenkin, Tory transport spokesman, on Prescott's new road building plans

*'Britain became more free-market in the 1990s. Blair is a continuation of Thatcher in many ways.'*

Bill Emmott, editor of *The Economist*

*'The Labour Party has not always been particularly green... the emphasis in politics for far too long has been on gross national product, on all getting richer and being better off... There's very little point in getting richer if the air you breathe is polluted.'*

Michael Meacher, Minister for the Environment

*'The facts are that the last decade was the hottest decade in a thousand years. If the temperature of the Earth continues at this rate, it is unsustainable. Within something like 50 years, in the United States, the Florida Everglades and the sugar cane fields in Louisiana will be under water... The world will be a very different place. There will be more extreme weather events. There will be more people displaced... This is a big deal.'*

Bill Clinton, after eight years of inaction, notices something is up

*'It's rare that I've had such a strong feeling that Europe is a fragile enterprise.'*  
Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, after the Nice Summit

*'[Globalisation is] an awful phrase. I wish it had never been invented. But the stupidity of thinking globalisation will stop if the WTO doesn't meet or the World Bank doesn't meet... I mean, give me a break.'*  
Mike Moore, WTO Director General

continued on page 11

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**The Environment Council**

# CLINTON COPS OUT

The outgoing US president has sidestepped his chance to be a dam-buster.

The Clinton administration has announced a \$352-million-a-year plan to balance energy demands with the notorious Columbia and Snake river dams' deadly effects on wildlife. The

long-awaited strategy will require as much as \$190 million in additional funding.

The fates of four dams on the lower Snake River were a key environmental issue in the presidential election campaign. President-elect Bush opposed the dams' removal, regarded by many independent scientists as the only way to halt the demise of salmon and steelhead species in the rivers.

The programme unveiled by the Clinton administration is not about dam removal but about habitat and hatchery improvements. But in a last minute appeal, 215



AP PHOTOS

federal, state, tribal, university and independent scientists from 27 states urged breaching the dams. In a letter to President Clinton they said that evidence cites the dams as the 'primary cause' for the sharp decline in salmon stocks.

Federal agencies which back the plan say that without drastic measures there is a 100 per cent chance of virtual extinction of nine of the 11 salmon and steelhead species in the Columbia and Snake river system. For now, it's the dams that are saved – whether the wild fish will be remains highly doubtful.

## NOTES & QUOTES<sub>2</sub>

'Actually breaking up the WTO would put us backwards. We would then have big rich governments and companies setting the rules for trade. Small and poor countries wouldn't have any say in it.'

Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development

'People have got wind of the excitement of the human genome project... the cancer research we are talking about now is big money stuff.'

Gordon McVie, director of the Cancer Research Campaign

'[There is]... clear evidence that the World's Bank operations in Indonesia caused significant harm to the people of Indonesia... and in view of the Bank's willingness to work closely with the oppressive and corrupt Suharto dictatorship... [the World Bank agrees to]... reform the Bank... creating conditions for genuinely sustainable development.'

Letter of Intent – commitments made by the World Bank to the Indonesian people, World Bank, Jakarta Office

According to The Institute of Policy Studies, of the world's top 100 economic entities, 51 are now corporations and 49 are countries

According to the World Health Organisation, between 2 and 5 million pesticide poisonings occur each year – of which 40,000 are fatal

More than 450 workers are leaving farming in England each week, and the total of nearly 24,000 losses in one year makes this the biggest exodus in living memory

Average Christmas bonus for a 'halfway decent banker' in 2000 – £500,000  
Average annual income of a UK farmer in 2000 – £7,500

2 billion – number of the world's undernourished and underweight  
1.1 billion – number of the world's overnourished and overweight

200,000 tonnes – the estimated current stock of mature haddock in the North Sea  
899,000 tonnes – the stock of mature haddock in the North Sea in 1995

STAN AT EASE  
by Stan Eales

## CONTEMPORARY IRONIES

A MOTORIST CURSING THE FLOODS THAT HIS CAR HELPED PRODUCE



A PROPERTY DEVELOPER WHO DIDN'T BUILD HIS HOUSE ON A FLOOD PLAIN



A MEAT INDUSTRY BOSS SCARED OF GETTING CJD.



A WEAPONS MANUFACTURER HORRIFIED WHEN THOSE WEAPONS ARE USED TO KILL PEOPLE



# A STICK IN THE SPOKES

*Is the world fragmenting into regional trade blocs?*

Ever since the opening of a new world trade round flopped in Seattle, efforts to get new negotiations under way have failed. Meanwhile, medium-sized and small European countries are growing increasingly sceptical of the EU's ability to come up with a 'unified approach' amongst its members, and for a new administration in the US to set its negotiation course.

As a result, regional trade accords are back in fashion. A trading group comprising Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland, which account for less than 3 per cent of world trade, intend to revive and expand their trade network. The group has signed up Mexico, Yugoslavia and the Latin American 'Mercosur' partners. And it's not an exclusively European phenomenon. Countries in Asia are also moving rapidly to pin down bilateral trade pacts. Asia-Pacific countries are queueing up to make sure that their companies have an equal footing with other countries, particularly China, expected to become a WTO member within the next few months.

Underlying this trend is a worry that multilateral trade progress is paralysed. In Europe, there is also concern that the continuing friction between the two biggest trading partners is creating a bad atmosphere; including weakening the WTO's 'credibility' as an effective trade arbiter.

Mike Moore, Director General of the WTO, in a speech last November, said 'globalisation is a word on everyone's lips, yet regional agreements have never been so popular.' He's right. Compared to 1990, when there were 50 regional trade groupings, today there are 200.

But Moore warned that regionalism 'does not lead towards an open world economy, but an unbalanced system of hub and spokes, with rich countries at the centre, holding all the cards, and developing countries on the periphery'. The difference between that and the WTO's 'open' system is still to be revealed.

## WARM WISHES

On Christmas Eve, a fire in Sellafield's Windscale Vitrification Plant (WVP) led to evacuation of all workers. The history of WVP, built at a cost of £240m, is littered with contamination and safety accidents. According to BNFL, no radioactivity was released and none of its workers was injured.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### HERE COME THE LITMUS FISH

Using gene technology, scientists are developing a 'rainbow' range of fluorescent fish that could be used to detect water-borne pollution. Zhiyuan Gong, biology professor at the National University of Singapore has, according to *The Financial Times*, already produced a green-and-red zebra fish. He is presently developing genetically modified zebra fish in which the fluorescent colour genes are switched on by specific chemicals in the water, such as heavy metals. The ultimate goal would be an indicator fish that turned a particular colour in response to a particular pollutant.

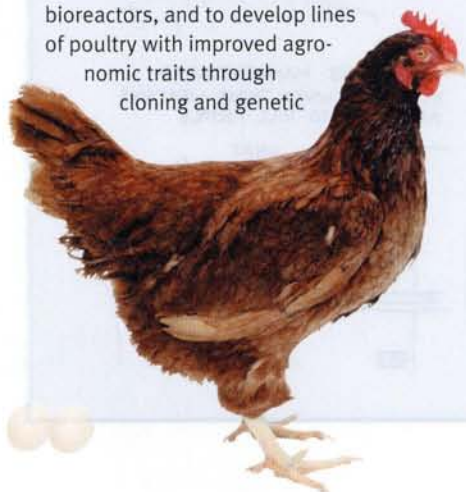


### AND IF YOU THINK THAT'S MAD...

Researchers from the Plymouth Environmental Research Centre (PERC) and Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML) have reported on a clever scientific experiment to investigate what controls the growth of algae in waters around the Antarctica. The experiment involved dumping several tonnes of iron into the ocean... and seeing what happened. What happened was a massive bloom which could be seen from a satellite several weeks after the experiment. The algae then sucked up a 'significant' amount of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Not 'significant' enough though, as 'further studies on the natural input of iron, its effect on algae and the air-sea exchange of carbon dioxide will be required to understand the longer term effects on our climate.'

### ... LISTEN TO THIS!

From [www.avigenics.com](http://www.avigenics.com): 'AviGenics Inc. is poised to be the first company to create and commercialise recombinant biopharmaceuticals using transgenic chickens as bioreactors, and to develop lines of poultry with improved agronomic traits through cloning and genetic



modification... Improved agronomic traits, such as faster-growing and disease-resisting birds, can quickly be incorporated into commercial poultry breeding and growing programmes, revolutionising the economics of the poultry industry forever.'

### UPDATE: MORE NUCLEAR MADNESS

Just a week prior to the closure of Chernobyl, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) gave its support to the completion of two nuclear reactors in the Ukraine – project K2/R4 (see *The Ecologist*, Vol 30 No 9). Apparently the decision was a close call, with only 63.7 per cent shareholding countries in support. The \$215 million EBRD loan is based on condition that additional funding is raised from other sources i.e. the EU and other export credit agencies. Export credit agencies contributing are: UK with \$28 million, Czech Republic with \$16 million, France with \$136 million, Spain with \$23 million, Switzerland with \$14 million and the US with \$131 million.

### UPDATE: SAFETY MATTERS

The controversial nuclear power plant at Temelin, Czech Republic, (see *The Ecologist*, Vol 30 No 9) will undergo a full environmental impact assessment after Austria and Germany claimed that it was not built to Western standards. Originally developed by the Communist government of Czechoslovakia, but delayed by safety and environmental concerns, the first of Temelin's two 981 MW reactors began a failed test run last October. The assessment will meet EU environmental laws and involve participation by potentially affected people, including those in neighbouring countries.

### UPDATE: OGDEN WITHDRAWS FROM MAHESHWAR DAM

The New-York-based Ogden Corporation has given in to protests and ended its involvement in the controversial Maheshwar Dam on India's Narmada river (see *The Ecologist*, Vol 30 No 6). According to Kent Burton, Ogden's vice president for policy and communications, the company decided to quit due to 'growing concerns on project economics'. Ogden is the latest in a series of foreign companies to have dropped out of Maheshwar. Other foreign companies still involved are Siemens of Germany, ABB Portugal and UK Engineers WS Atkins. Project promoter S Kumars, an Indian textile firm with no prior experience in dam building, is currently seeking additional support from Indian public institutions. Visit [www.narmada.org](http://www.narmada.org) and [www.irn.org](http://www.irn.org)

## GOOD ORGANIC NEWS 1

Public concern about food safety has led Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, the Italian Agriculture Minister, to declare that only organic food will be served in Italy's schools. What's more, Monsanto, AgroEvo GmbH and Novartis have failed to win approval to sell four GM foods in Italy after the EU commission backed the ban implemented by the Italian government last August. Globally, meanwhile, food scares have dramatically increased demand for organic products. Whilst organic food production in Australia is growing at a rate of 25 per cent a year, the Alpine, Mediterranean and Scandinavia countries still produce growth rates as high as 30 per cent.

## GOOD ORGANIC NEWS 2

In late December, the US Department of Agriculture announced final adoption of the first standards the Federal government has ever imposed for the labelling and processing of organic foods. The new standards ban the use of irradiation, biotechnology and sewage-sludge fertiliser for any food labelled 'organic'. When the department introduced proposed regulation in 1997, all three of these methods were allowed to be used, but after 300,000 people wrote letters of protest against their inclusion, the department withdrew that proposal and started again. Also banned will be the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilisers in food as well as the use of antibiotics in meat labelled 'organic'. While the Bush administration could try to overturn the rule, which does not become fully effective until 2002, there is little such expectation, given the importance of sales and high amount of popular support. The moral of the story: public pressure works!

## TURKEY FOR CHRISTMAS?

An outbreak of listeria in Cargill corporation's 'turkey deli' meat in late December is suspected of causing 28 cases, four food-poisoning deaths and three miscarriages in the US. The outbreak materialised just as the Clinton administration prepared to unveil a set of proposals aimed at getting meat processors to eliminate listeria. The micro-organism is particularly dangerous, and continues to grow in refrigerated food. The push for more effective regulation reached a climax last year, after listeria-contaminated hot dogs were implicated in 21 food-poisoning deaths.

In 1999, listeria was the cause of 88 per cent of Americans hospitalised with food-borne diseases. Although Federal government regulation has a so-called 'zero tolerance' policy for listeria in sealed, ready-to-eat food packages, Cargill wasn't obliged to launch a recall because its meat was not from sealed packages. Cargill has now 'voluntarily' recalled 16.7 million pounds of its products.

## THE WORMS TURN

To limit the spread of parasites like tapeworm eggs, EU vets say cows might need to be kept indoors throughout their lives. Tapeworms live in both the human and animal intestine, then spread their eggs through excrement and, apparently, by cows eating grass. Usually signs of the parasites' presence are supposed to be identified in abattoirs where the affected meat is frozen to kill the infestation. Unfortunately, infested meat is slipping through. Bad news if the vets get their way but intensive farming practices continue to lead to run-off effluent (see [www.hogwatch.org](http://www.hogwatch.org)) and to toxic sludge being spread on the field, creating the parasite problem in the first place.

## DON'T GO SWIMMING

In early December, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) presented its long-awaited \$1.2 billion dollar plan to remedy the Hudson River's troubles with toxic PCBs. The

General Electric Company (GE), which dumped the chemical into the river from its factories, has vowed to fight back with every resource at its command. From 1946 to 1977 (when the chemical was banned) GE, under state permits, was allowed to dump one million pounds of PCBs into the river. A week prior to the unveiling of EPA's plan, GE filed a federal lawsuit challenging provisions of the 'Superfund' cleanup law as 'unconstitutional'. Environmental Groups such as the Sierra Club plan to push just as hard with a national advertising campaign that will expose what the group's leaders say is a corporate effort to gut the nation's environmental protection laws.

## EXXON MOBIL FINED \$3.5 BILLION FOR DEFRAUDING ALABAMA

Exxon Mobil has been ordered to pay \$3.5 billion in punitive damages for defrauding the state of Alabama. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources sued the oil company for deducting 'expenses' from the natural gas production royalties paid to the state. The jury decision placed the punitive damages on top of the \$87 million in back royalties owed by Exxon Mobil. Internal Exxon Mobil documents proved that employees had pointed out the error to their superiors. Company executives allegedly responded that the state was unlikely to notice. Exxon Mobil plans to appeal against the sentence.



## EAT UP YOUR GUNS

Last June, the World Bank endorsed a deal to build a giant pipeline from Chad to Cameroon, operated by an Exxon-Mobil-led consortium. For 10 years the project had been opposed by both human rights and environmental groups (see *The Ecologist*, Vol 30 No 5). The former groups' opposition was based on the fear that much of the bank's loan and funds would go straight to Chad's military. They were right. As soon as Exxon partners Chevron and Petronas released a \$25 million cash bonus to ensure a tax break, Chad President Idriss Deby went shopping and bought \$4 million worth of weapons. Attending a two-day UN conference of donors who pledged \$280 million to speed his country's economic development, President Deby avoided direct answers to reporters, saying, 'Of course the resources have been used in priority sectors. It is patently obvious that without security, there can be no development programmes.'



## CAMPAIGNS

Please send information on your local, national or international campaigns to Stephanie Roth at: The Ecologist Unit 18, Chelsea Wharf, 15 Lots Road, London SW10 0OJ, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)20 7351 3578. Fax: +44 (0)20 7351 3617. Email: campaigns@theecologist.org

### UK THE FOURTH BATTLE OF NEWBURY

With 42,500 new homes scheduled to be built across Berkshire between 2006 and 2016, all four sides of Newbury are facing the prospect of being hemmed in by large-scale housing developments. In late November, Sutton Estates, which owns large swathes of land on the both sides of the controversial bypass that was constructed in the mid-1990s despite the biggest road protest the UK has ever seen, announced its intention to build a 750-home estate on green belt land west of the town.

The problem for the developers is that the land they want to use – known as Enborne Hedges – cuts into the historical site of the first battle of Newbury, a key Civil War engagement of 1643. So Sutton Estates has devised a cunning plan to persuade 30,000 local people to give their support during a forthcoming public consultation. Amazingly, they have produced a proposal to persuade people that allowing them to build houses all over the battlefield is the best way to protect it.

The plan, says Sutton, will involve 'restoration of the principal areas of the battlefield on

which the first battle of Newbury was fought in 1643' plus, of course, 'the creation of a new residential neighbourhood of traditional design and layout at the edge of town.' Not only that, but Sutton will also grant lucky residents 'the protection of 216 ha. of open land between Newbury and the bypass against future development'. Ex-road-protesters will have heard that one before.

In fact, this is little more than a cleverly disguised plan to build houses on historic green belt land. The 'protected area' of 216 ha. actually includes the 'battlefield restoration scheme', which itself will involve building a 'Battlefield Interpretation Centre', two '17th century' farm buildings, interpretation routes and viewpoints. The remainder is land along the noisy bypass.

Good news for Sutton, bad news – again – for the stunning countryside around Newbury. It's the same story with house-building all over the country. If Newbury is to survive as its people know it, Sutton must be stopped – or a dangerous precedent will be set.

#### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Make the authorities and developers aware of your objections to the Enborne Hedges development. Write to The Chief Planning Officer, Nigel Gilmore, West Berkshire Council, Council Offices, Market Street, Newbury RG14 5LD. Send a copy to GKA (acting for Sutton Estates), attn. of Gerald Knight, 2-4 High Street, Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross, SL9 9QA and to anti-development campaigner Janet Griffin, 6 Denmark Road, Newbury RG14 5SR.

### INDONESIA SAVE SIBERUT

The island of Siberut is the largest of the seventy Mentawai Islands off the west coast of Sumatra, in Indonesia. Approximately 23,000 Mentawai tribal people live there.

Many have been resettled into government villages and 'assimilated' into mainstream Indonesian life. Others live by fishing, hunting and gathering, in traditional groups of about 30 to 80 people in small settlements along the rivers.

Unlike much of Indonesia, Siberut is still covered by primary forests, protected as a UNESCO biosphere reserve and national park. Despite these protections, and an outright ban on logging, the Mentawai forests are currently under threat from logging and oil palm plantations. New local autonomy laws in Indonesia have given greater decision-making power to district officials, who are keen to develop 'natural resources' regardless of the protected status of the area or the reaction of tribal people. Recently there has been an increase in logging and plantation licences on Siberut.

The Mentawai community is divided on how to respond. Some, especially those who have been resettled, want to encourage the developments as a means of generating income. Many others are distraught at the prospect of the destruction of their forest home. Some loggers have exploited these divisions, 'persuading' individual Mentawai to sign over tracts of communal land to

#### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Support the rights of the Mentawai against the loggers by writing to President KH Abdurrahman Wahid, President RI, Istana Merdeka, Jakarta 10110, Indonesia, fax: +62213452685, email: presiden@ri.go.id and to Mr Bungaran Saragih, Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, Jl Harsono RM3, Ragunan, Pasar Minggu, Jakarta Selatan 12550, Indonesia, fax: +62217800220. Please copy your letter to Survival International, 11-15 Emerald Street, London WC1N 3QL and visit [www.survival-international.org](http://www.survival-international.org)

#### With the next IPCC meeting lined up for May, arm yourself with all the latest climate change info

[www.save-our-world.org](http://www.save-our-world.org)

A global petition shaming the US Congress ratifying the Kyoto Agreement on Climate Change to be presented shortly before the UN Earth Summit in 2002.

[www.xs4all.nl/~ceo/greenhouse/index.html](http://www.xs4all.nl/~ceo/greenhouse/index.html)

Download 'Greenhouse Market Mania', a special report on how, from their very onset, the UN climate talks were (and still are) corrupted by corporate pseudo-solutions.

[www.groenlinks.nl/partij/europa/home.html](http://www.groenlinks.nl/partij/europa/home.html)

Download 'Coming Green' and find how 'clean' nuclear energy really is.

[www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

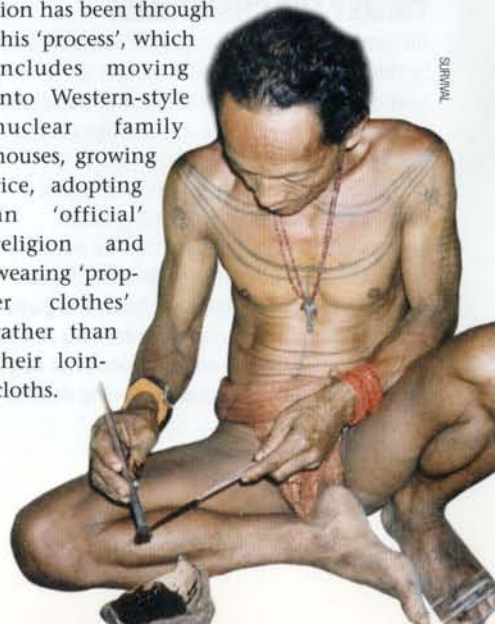
Download 'Collision Course: Free trade's free ride on the global climate' to find out about the impacts of freight transport and global trade on climate.

[www.acfonline.org.au/whatsnew/mr11\\_13.htm](http://www.acfonline.org.au/whatsnew/mr11_13.htm)

Download 'Faking it' and learn how Australia is 'cheating' on Climate Change.

their chainsaws.

All the while, Indonesia's Department of Social Affairs' 'civilisation and development' programme, aimed at 'integrating' Indonesia's myriad of peoples into the urban Javan mainstream, is pressurising the Mentawai to give up their traditional way of life. So far, over a third of Siberut's population has been through this 'process', which includes moving into Western-style nuclear family houses, growing rice, adopting an 'official' religion and wearing 'proper clothes' rather than their loin-cloths.



SARAWAN



UK

## WHO SAID GM WAS SAFE?

In the United States, farmers buying GM seeds from Monsanto will from this year have to sign a 'Technology Agreement' which states that, 'in no event shall Monsanto or any seller be liable for any incidental, consequential, special or punitive damages'. In plain English, this means that the company which insists that there are no dangers from GM crops has now decided that it will not be held responsible should this be proved wrong.

In response, here in the UK, Alan Simpson brought the 'Genetically Modified Food and Producer Bill' before the House of Commons in November 2000. This Bill would require biotech companies to have cover for any claims against them, and to establish a fund for cases where blame is difficult to define. Since GM foods are so safe, you wouldn't think the biotech boys would object. You'd be wrong. According to Simpson, 'when asked a single question, "would they accept producer liability for those products?"', the answer was absolutely "no".



Maybe those protesters were right after all. Last summer, German researchers proved that pollen from GM rape could cross the species barrier by positively identifying it in bacteria from the guts of honeybees.

This was the first publicly documented case of horizontal gene transfer from GM crops – something the industry has always said was impossible. More recently, in a letter to the editors of Environmental Impacts ([www.beekeeping.com/articles/afb\\_gm.htm](http://www.beekeeping.com/articles/afb_gm.htm)), Joe Rowland, a commercial beekeeper, noted that resistance to the antibiotic tetracycline, used in beekeeping, has recently appeared across parts of the US and Canada. According to Rowland, the antibiotic gene used in the creation of Monsanto's 'Roundup Ready' crops, planted all across America in recent years, is resistant to tetracycline. Coincidence?

Simpson's bill could set an important precedent, but may well fail without public support.

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Write to your MP, urging him/her to fully support the Bill.

Write to Tony Blair (10 Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA) and Environment Minister Michael Meacher (110 Union Street, Oldham, OL1 1DU) and ask why biotech companies should not be responsible for their products.

# CAMPAIGNS DIARY

3 February & 17 February 2001  
*Cardiff & Brighton, UK.*

**Exposing the Myth of the Global Economy**  
Teach-ins organised by the WDM, Friends of the Earth, People and Planet. For tickets and information contact Amanda Brace at FOE +44(0) 2074901555

8-10 February 2001  
*Palais des Congrès  
Lyon, France.*

**BioSquare 2001 – The Davos of the Life Sciences**

Co-hosted by the Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO), EuropaBio, JBA and Bio Vision, biotechnology companies from all sectors will meet with business development and research executives from the pharmaceutical, industrial, agricultural & environmental industries as well as top financial companies. Visit [www.dechema.de/biotech/biosquare.htm](http://www.dechema.de/biotech/biosquare.htm) or contact +49 345522622.

9-10 February 2001  
*Bangor, Gwynedd, Wales.*

**Wales and the World – Conference for Global Justice**

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For more information call +44 (0)1286882359 or email [information@globalcymru.org.uk](mailto:information@globalcymru.org.uk)

12 February 2001  
*Faslane on the Clyde near Glasgow, Scotland.*

**The Big Blockade**  
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12-13/14 February 2001  
*Chatham House, London, UK.*  
**The Development of the Middle East: North Africa, the GCC, Iraq, Iran and the Caspian**  
Senior representatives from the private sector, energy companies, governments and commentators will assess the opportunities for companies in the 'development' of Middle East energy, from North Africa to the Caspian. Sponsored and supported by Lasmo, British Airways and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Visit [www.riia.org](http://www.riia.org) or call +44 (0)2079575700

15-16 February & 27-28 February 2001  
*London, UK. & New York, USA.*  
**Implementing JI & CDM – Project Finance in a Carbon Economy**  
Analysing the potential for project-based mechanisms after COP6  
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15-18 February 2001  
*Nuremberg, Germany.*

**Bio Fach 2001**  
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17-20 February 2001  
*Shanghai, China.*

**8th Session of Working Group I of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change**  
Visit [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch) or call +41 227308208

18-24 February 2001  
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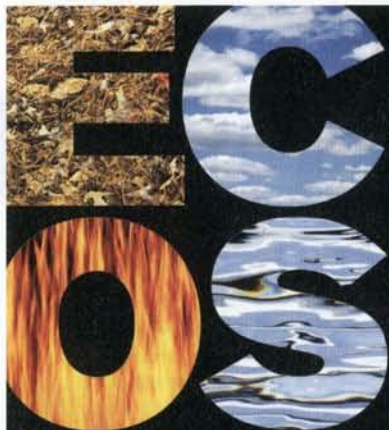
19-21 February 2001  
*Waldorf-Astoria Hotel  
New York, NY, USA.*

**Investing in Biotechnology: The Value, the Risks, the Rewards**  
CEO & Investor Conference organised by the Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO)  
Visit [www.investinbio.org](http://www.investinbio.org) or contact 'bio' on +1 202 8570244

22-24 February 2001  
*Sacramento, California, USA.*  
**Politics and Realities of Wildlife Conservation at the start of the 21st century**  
Visit [www.tws-west.org/meetings.html](http://www.tws-west.org/meetings.html) or call +1 9166531738

23-25 February 2001  
*Ascona, Switzerland.*  
**Fingerprints for climate change: adapted behaviour and shifting species ranges**  
International conference aiming to examine possible indicators for global warming in the changing patterns of species distribution and behaviour. Visit [www.csf-mv.ethz.ch](http://www.csf-mv.ethz.ch) or fax +41 16355906

24-25 February 2001  
*Hunter College, New York, NY, USA.*  
**Globalisation: The Technological Dimension – Do we know where we are heading?**  
IFG teach-in on the global impacts of biotechnology, human eugenics, global telecommunication technologies, the global homogenisation of consciousness and control. Speakers amongst others include Jeremy Rifkin, Jerry Mander, David Suzuki, David Ehrenfeld, Fritjof Capra, Francis Moore Lappe, Kirkpatrick Sale and Bill McKibben. Visit [www.ifg.org](http://www.ifg.org) or call +1 4152299350



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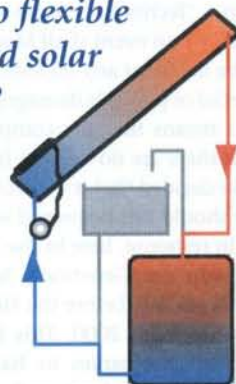
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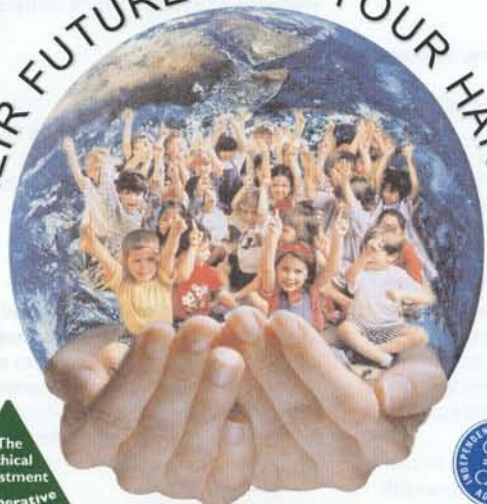
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Download 'Towards Sustainable Economies: challenging neoliberal economic globalisation', a briefing challenging several assumptions upon which 'free trade' is based.

[www.forumsyd.se/globala.htm](http://www.forumsyd.se/globala.htm)  
Download 'Trade and Hunger', an overview of case studies on the impact of trade liberalisation on food security.

[www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com)  
'All the junk that's fit to debunk' – takes you into a virtual world of argumentative chess games on subjects like global warming, genetic engineering etc., incl. links to various forums. Debunk this: [www.acsh.org/press/editorials/biotech120600.html](http://www.acsh.org/press/editorials/biotech120600.html)

[www.nwf.org/finance](http://www.nwf.org/finance)  
A project about pushing financiers and investors not to invest in environmentally destructive projects whilst informing you whether your bank cares about the environment and what you can do. Make sure to sign on to their excellent 'Bear & Bull' newsletter.

[www.motherjones.com/fotc/fotc33.html](http://www.motherjones.com/fotc/fotc33.html)  
Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman return with their annual list of the worst corporate citizens of the last 12 months.

**GLOBAL SMASH OCCIDENTAL'S STOCKHOLDERS**

Last September Italian Green Party Senator Stephano Boco announced that the Green Party of Europe is prepared to bring the case of the U'wa, the Colombian Indians who have threatened to commit suicide if their land is drilled for oil, to the Hague Tribunals. The very next day, more than 80 trucks carrying drilling equipment arrived on U'wa territory, protected by thousands of Colombian troops. Barely a week later, in an interview with the Colombian daily *El Espectador*, retired US Special Forces Sergeant Stan Goff admitted that the US military's 'principal interest [in Colombia] is oil. They seek to defend the operations of Occidental Petroleum ('Oxy'), British Petroleum and to secure control of the future Colombian [oil] fields.' A month on, Oxy has begun drilling on U'wa territory.

In December last year, human rights and environmental organisations launched a



FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

campaign against the Achilles heel of Oxy. Building on their success in persuading Fidelity, Oxy's main investor which divested half its stock in the company following a public campaign, Amazon Watch, Project Underground, Rainforest Action

University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, United Parcel Service, Wisconsin Power & Light and Coca-Cola.

Last April, Sanford Bernstein President Roger Hertog promised the U'wa that he would seriously investigate his company's investments in Occidental, and let the U'wa know of his position. Since then, this company has acquired an additional 10 million shares of Occidental stock. The desperate U'wa have heard nothing.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Write to Roger Hertog, President, Sanford C Bernstein & Co, 767 Fifth Avenue 10153-0185, New York, USA, fax: +1 202 756 4453, copy your letter to Amazon Watch (below).

Contact one of the NGOs and ask about organising a day of action at a Sanford C Bernstein office close to you. Sanford C. Bernstein has various offices throughout the US and one in the UK (see [www.sanfordbernstein.com/contact\\_us.asp](http://www.sanfordbernstein.com/contact_us.asp)). For more information contact Amazon Watch, 115 S.

Topanga Canyon Blvd., Suite E, Topanga, Ca.90290, USA. Fax +1 3104550619 or visit [www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org), email: [amazon@amazonwatch.org](mailto:amazon@amazonwatch.org)

Network and the Ruckus Society are now targeting Sanford C Bernstein & Co. The company became the largest investor in Occidental after Fidelity backed out. Sanford Bernstein holds 53 million shares (valued at \$1.19 billion) in Occidental Petroleum.

The NGOs are urging Sanford Bernstein and other major Occidental shareholders to follow Fidelity's example and divest from this morally bankrupt company. Sanford Bernstein manages about \$72 billion worth of assets, and counts amongst its clients the

**World-Wise Web: The five best campaigns**

[www.ran.org/info\\_center/aa/aa151\\_montiel.html](http://www.ran.org/info_center/aa/aa151_montiel.html)  
Sign an open letter to Mexican president Vicente Fox urging him to immediately and unconditionally release Rodolfo Montiel Flores and Teodoro Cadrera Garcia, the two campesino-ecologists (see *The Ecologist*, Vol 30 No 5).

[www.nrdc.org/land/forests/nsbgb.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/land/forests/nsbgb.asp)  
Send a message to David Hamill, CEO of Parr Lumber, to stop him buying wood products from Interfor, a logging company destroying the ancient rainforest habitat of the white Spirit Bear in British Columbia.

[www.earthjustice.org/work/seaturtle/action.html](http://www.earthjustice.org/work/seaturtle/action.html)  
Send a message to President Fox of Mexico and his Environment Secretary urging them to revoke their decision to allow a development project in X'cacelito, the most important nesting beach for sea turtles in the entire Mexican Caribbean.

[www.geocities.com/RainForest/Jungle/5835/dolphins.html](http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Jungle/5835/dolphins.html)  
Send a message to those in power to stop the killing of dolphins and turtles by dynamite fishing in the San Bernadino Strait, Philippines.

[www.sunshine-project.org/agua/english.html](http://www.sunshine-project.org/agua/english.html)  
Sign an open letter to the president of Colombia and his minister for the Environment urging them to stop using biological and toxic weapons in the drug war.



**US STOP FAST TRACK FAST!**

Just three months into his first term, new US President Bush will travel to Quebec City in Canada to attend the third Summit of the Americas (17-21 April). The summit, which was begun as an informal gathering by President Clinton in 1994, has developed into an institutional mechanism to identify the hemisphere's 'common' political, economic and social agenda (that's 'common' to corporations and politicians, of course)

The primary goal of the summit is to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). According to Luis J Lauredo, US Permanent Representative to the Organisation of American States, 'negotiations are moving ahead, and by 2005 we hope to have a single market for the Americas'.

This view was reinforced by Bush, who, during the presidential campaign, said that he would kick-start the process of getting an FTAA signed by 2005. It would build on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and unite 34 of the countries in North, Central and South America into what Clinton said would

be 'the world's largest market'. It seems, then, that one of the actions in the new, divided, Congress could be a bruising battle over 'fast track' authority, the legislative tool that President Bush will need to negotiate a comprehensive trade deal in time. Under fast track, trade deals are brought to Congress for approval without the chance to change or amend them in any way.

Even though Republicans narrowly control the House of Representatives, Bush is likely to have to reach out to Democrats to get fast track approved. Although this could give Democrats the chance to bargain for labour and environmental standards in the FTAA, Bush has made it clear that he does not support such standards if they are 'too rigidly drawn'. It is expected that Bush will propose approval of fast-track authority within the first 100 days in office.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

There is not much time to stop fast track. Download a sample letter to your senator and member of Congress on [www.tradewatch.org/FTAA/FTAAactionalert.htm](http://www.tradewatch.org/FTAA/FTAAactionalert.htm), forcing them to learn enough to answer your questions on this sneak attack on democracy, human rights standards and the environment. Also download a sample 'letter to the editor' that will get you started to spread the news in your community. For more information contact TradeWatch on +1 2025881000.

**US DIAMOND IS FOREVER?**

Diamond is a neighbourhood of four streets in the town of Narco, Louisiana. It also happens to be the heart of the region's infamous 'cancer alley'. This historic neighbourhood is occupied by a Shell chemical facility, which, say many residents, is slowly destroying it.

Since Shell entered the community in the 1950s, it has been buying up areas of Diamond for its expanding industrial needs. Outside the facility fence Shell has created an unofficial 'buffer zone', turning many homes into vacant lots and giving the neighbourhood the appearance of a ghost town. The Shell chemical plant and oil refinery have dramatically reduced the area's property value, with their large volumes of toxic pollution, fires, explosions, flaring and chemical spills.

Then there's the pollution. Samples taken by the community's 'Bucket Brigade' – volunteers using a self-built air-sampling tool – have proven that hazardous chemicals are virtually always in the air. A community health survey by Xavier University

revealed that respiratory complaints, chest pains, asthma and bronchitis are common. During 1999, the Shell plant experienced 'upsets' on average once a week, many of which result in flaring. If the toxic chemicals sent to the flare are not fully combusted, the citizens are exposed to them. If steam is introduced to the flare to aid combustion, nearby homes shake with the deafening noise.

A criminal investigation by the EPA and a damning account of the company's environmental practices by a whistleblower last summer only confirmed the community's fears. Now Diamond's residents want something done.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Write to The Shell Plant Manager, Jim Kimes, Shell Chemical Company, PO. Box 10, Narco, La.70079 USA. Copy your letter with a note to: Governor Mike Foster, PO. Box 94004, Baton Rouge, La.70804 USA, La. Dept. of Environmental Quality, Dale Givens, 7290 Bluebonnet Blvd, Baton Rouge, La. USA, USEPA Region 6, Samuel J. Coleman – 6EN, 1445 Ross Ave., Suite #1200, Dallas, TX 75202-2733, USA. and to Concerned Citizens of Norco, 26 Washington Street, Norco, La.70079, USA.

**PANAMA SPITTING ON THE DOCK OF THE BAY**

With the help of a \$70 million loan from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's private sector lending arm, the Corredor Sur toll road project in Panama was completed last February. The road is a 19.5 km toll highway, part of which runs over Panama Bay near the coastline.

Under a 30-year concession, a private company will operate and maintain the highway. The same company – ICA – has been granted the property rights for a development known as Punta Pacifica, which consists of filling in portions of Panama Bay to create islands on which luxury real estate can be built. Independent hydrology experts from California-based Philip Williams & Associates (PWA) have warned against the landfill islands. They say that the highway's rock causeway is already obstructing an important coastal current that serves as a vital cleanser for the 40 million metric tonnes of raw sewage that Panama Bay receives each year. By literally trapping the waste, the landfill islands are likely to cause serious environmental and health problems. A recent study found that sewage treatment for the bay would cost between \$200 and \$300 million.

In recent months, construction of the islands has come to a sudden halt. Local NGOs say now is the perfect time for the international community to ask the President of Panama to stop the landfills.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Write to Her Excellency, Mrs. Mireya Moscoso, President of the Republic of Panama, Palacio de las Garzas, Panama 1, Panama. Fax: +5072272332. For a sample letter, visit [www.theecologist.org](http://www.theecologist.org) Please copy your letter to Felix Wing Solis, Director, Fundacion para el Desarrollo de la Libertad Ciudadana, Calle del IPA y Ave.12 de Octubre, Duplex L-4, PO. Box 810-266, Zona 10, Panama, Fax +5072290294, email: [libertad@pty.com](mailto:libertad@pty.com)

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# CAN SMALL FARMS

SÉAN RICKARD AND STEVEN GORELICK

## Dear Steven

A popular myth peddled by the ecologist movement is that larger scale farm enterprises do more harm than good and as a civilisation we would all be 'better off' if we relied on small farms to feed us. I profoundly disagree, indeed I believe it would be disastrous if governments introduced agricultural policies designed to reverse the slow, but steady trend towards larger scale farms. This does not imply that small farms have no role or purpose, but it does recognise that in the developed and developing worlds the fact that the bulk of food is, and will increasingly be, produced on larger scale farms arises from forces more fundamental than agricultural policy; indeed, the attempts by agricultural policies to slow structural change only results in an over-manned industry and widespread inefficiency.

I must confess to some difficulty with the concept of a small farm. This cannot refer to a farm's land area as the income generated will depend on the quality of the land, the type of farming and the management skills of the farmer. In my experience, when people talk of a small farm they have in mind the scale of enterprise just capable of supporting one farming family at a standard of living comparable to that enjoyed by their fellow citizens. As economic growth raises living standards this implies that 'small farms' must be capable of generating an ever higher income; that is, be capable of steadily increasing productivity. To argue otherwise is to condemn farming families to a falling standard of living.

Rising living standards are the product of rising productivity which in turn, is based on two powerful forces: knowledge and technology. In farming, as elsewhere, these forces replace people with machines, a process that increases the minimum efficient size of farm.

I understand and sympathise with those involved in farming who find their incomes insufficient and who see no future in the industry for their children, if not themselves. But their plight is the product of rising productivity and what most people would recognise as progress. No economy can survive for long on the basis of guaranteeing its population lifetime employment in their job of choice, nor an unchanged way of life. I might also add that the tendency to equate small farms with a 'farming idyll of yesterday' is so far from the truth as to be laughable. It is only in relatively recent years that the hard physical work and abject poverty of most people engaged in farming has been relieved.

We should also remember that an industry composed solely of small scale farms would be a labour

intensive industry and hence a high-cost industry. The outcome of such an industry structure would be higher food prices. Why should people be forced to pay more for their food? And what would be the consequences for jobs in other sectors that have developed as people have switched their expenditure saved on purchasing food to other activities?

The answer I am frequently told is that farming is different because its workbench is the countryside, with its biodiversity and aesthetic qualities and it has a special role in the culture of rural life. According to this viewpoint, larger scale farms are only perceived to produce cheap food because the cost of the damage they do to rural culture and the countryside is not incorporated in food prices.

I have listened to these arguments for almost 30 years, and while they have some merit, it is not so easy to place the blame at the door of large scale farms. There is no serious academic study that concludes that small farms are good for the environment and large farms bad. Research suggests that it depends on the quality of the management, ie, the farmer, and the resources available to the farms. In short, there is no relationship between the number of farms and the quality of the environment. Small farms can, and do, cause damage just as much as large farms. In many parts of the world subsistence farms do enormous environmental damage in scraping a meagre living from unproductive land. In developed nations, impoverished small scale farms tend to produce the aesthetically displeasing crumbling buildings and unrepaired fences and walls.

Many of these environmental concerns do need to be tackled but it is worth reminding ourselves that as a result of rising productivity people are now sufficiently well fed and affluent to think about the way food is produced rather than its sufficiency and cost. It is undeniable that as the numbers engaged in farming decline, so the character of rural communities will change. In developed nations, the quality of life for many people who work in other sectors of the economy is enhanced by the opportunity to live and work in rural areas. Some rural residents resent this changing pattern but in free societies we should do our best to accommodate the will of the majority.

To sum up, farming is in essence just another industry. However, as the producer of the most basic of all necessities and the main user of the countryside, its methods of production can never be a matter of indifference. Regulation must be utilised to ensure the profit incentive does not compromise safety and sustainability. But where I profoundly disagree with the critics of modern farming is that the trinity of productivity, safety and sustainability would be better provided by an industry composed of small scale farms. The evidence as regards safety and sustainability comes down to management and



**Séan Rickard** was Director of Cranfield's Executive MBA Programme between 1995 and 1999. He is currently one of a small number of economists serving on the government's Panel of Academic Economists. He was part of the team which prepared the present government's rural economy and agricultural manifesto.

# NO

# FEED THE WORLD?

TACKLE ONE OF TODAY'S MAJOR ISSUES.

resources, not size. Productivity is also influenced by management, but the evidence shows that it tends to be much higher on larger scale enterprises. Thus, if we want our food produced efficiently and those engaged in farming to enjoy higher incomes, we must encourage good management and accept that larger scale enterprises are more likely to secure these objectives than their smaller scale counterparts.

Séan Rickard

## Dear Séan

It is highly ironic that your letter refers to a 'myth' peddled by the ecological movement. No-one peddles more myths than the conventional economist, whose view of the world bears only the slightest connection to reality. Implicit in your letter is the mistaken belief that people the world over can be reduced to a version of homo economicus that thinks and acts like a resident of London or New York. You seem unaware, for example, that roughly 2 billion people still get their sustenance from traditional farming systems; you can't describe their farms, at least, as 'just another industry'.

The myth most central to this debate – that 'big farms are more efficient than small farms' – is among those your letter propagates. Your closing statement, in fact, claims that big farms are not only more 'productive' than small farms, but are more sustainable and provide safer food. You are wrong on all counts.

The greater efficiency you claim for large farms can only refer to production per unit of labour. Since smaller farms are more labour-intensive than larger, highly mechanised farms, they are less productive in this narrow sense. But Peter Rosset of Food First has extensively studied the relative productivity of small and large farms, and has found that smaller farms are anywhere from 200 to 1,000 per cent more productive per unit of land than larger farms. This relationship holds true in both North and South, in every country for which data is available.

Since production per hectare steadily drops as farms grow in size, the trend toward larger farms is a disastrous one if the global population is to be fed from the world's limited amount of arable land. If, however, the goal is not to feed people, but to create a pool of cheap labour by 'replacing people with machines' and driving them from the land – as seems to be your definition of 'progress' – then you and other economists will prefer large farms.

Your next claim, that large farms are more 'sustainable' than small farms, apparently rests upon the pallid assertion that large-scale farms do no more damage to the environment than small-scale farms. (I'm quite amazed that for 30 years you've managed to avoid studies contradicting that belief. I will send you a copy of *Bringing the Food Economy Home: The Social, Ecological, and Economic Benefits of Local Food*,

a recent report from ISEC that should help fill this peculiar gap in your reading.)

It is true in theory that any given small farm might employ toxic agrochemicals, genetically modified seeds, or other techniques typical of industrial agriculture. But in practice the smaller a farm is and the more local its market, the easier it is for the farmer to diversify production, employ organic methods, nurture the soil, and maintain the biodiversity of the farm and its environs. The larger a farm is, on the other hand, the more likely it is to be monocultural, require the use of polluting agrochemicals, and transport its produce long distances, thus entailing further pollution costs.

Aside from these (and other) negative impacts on the environment, large-scale agriculture systematically erodes its own foundation. In parts of America's industrial farmland, the heavy use of machinery and chemicals exacts a price of 20 pounds of topsoil for every pound of grain harvested. Thanks to large scale irrigation, an estimated 10 million hectares of land must be abandoned every year due to salinity and/or waterlogging. Identical crop strains have displaced so many local varieties that 75 per cent of the world's agricultural diversity has disappeared in the last century. These are not the characteristics of a sustainable food system.

Lastly, you claim that large farms are preferable on grounds of 'safety', which I take to mean safe food. Again, this position is untenable. When farming is reduced to 'just another industry' and food 'just another commodity', the quality of our food inevitably suffers. Many chemical inputs required by large scale monocultural production – and less likely to be found on smaller farms – end up in our foods and, eventually, in our bodies. A survey by the US Environmental Protection Agency, for example, found that 80 per cent of adults and 90 per cent of children have measurable amounts of pesticide in their urine.

As food production, marketing and distribution become more globalised, the entire food system is growing so large that the corporations that dominate it can increase their profits by millions of dollars by saving a few cents on each animal's feed, or by using chemicals or processing methods that reduce costs by a fraction of a per cent. This may give us 'cheap food', but it does not give us safe food. It is therefore not surprising that food poisoning incidents in the UK have increased five-fold in the last 20 years. Things are no different in the US: a study by the Center for Disease Control and



DEBATE



## Steven Gorelick

is the US Programmes Director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC), and a member of The Ecologist's editorial board. His ISEC credits include *Small is Beautiful*, *Big is Subsidised*, and *Bringing the Food Economy Home* (with Helena Norberg-Hodge and Todd Merrifield). He lives on a small organic farm in northeast Vermont.

# YES

**'It is as fatuous for you to claim that modern food systems are generally damaging to health as it would be for me to argue that we all live longer because of modern food systems.'**

**Séan Rickard**



✦ Prevention points out that outbreaks of food-borne disease are more likely today because of the trend toward fewer, bigger food production facilities and longer distance distribution. And speaking of the hazards of industrial food, does Mad Cow Disease ring any bells?

*Steven Gorelick*

### **Dear Steven**

You chide me for peddling myths, and then peddle a few of your own. Let's see if we can narrow the apparent difference between us. I hope you will agree that given a choice, rational people will always choose efficiency as opposed to inefficiency. Efficiency however, is neither an absolute nor a simple concept.

In an under-developed country where the stark choice facing most families is subsistence farming or hunger, it is more efficient to grow food than starve however low labour productivity and whatever the damage to the environment. In the developed world we have choices and can encourage low productivity workers to move out of farming into other occupations with higher productivity.

I find your claim that my approach to greater efficiency 'can only refer to production per unit of labour' bemusing. If labour productivity rises we can pay those engaged in farming higher incomes. You then perplex me by claiming that 'production per hectare steadily drops as farms grow in size'. This is just not true: it is contradicted by all the available data. Larger farms tend to produce more milk or more cereals per hectare than their smaller counterparts. Overall, larger farms use less resources per unit of output: this is why they produce food more cheaply and in using less resources you, as an environmentalist, should applaud.

If, at a given point in time, we go on increasing the scale of an individual farm, there will come a point when total factor productivity starts to decline. But this point: (a) depends on the farm's management; and (b) is not fixed and over time the scale a farm can reach before total factor productivity starts to decline is increased by technology and management developments.

This brings me to your observation that I have 'managed to avoid studies that show large scale farms do more damage to the environment'. I have certainly come across studies and examples where badly managed larger scale farms have damaged the environment. But I have also come across well managed, larger scale farms that take care to protect and enhance the natural environment and I can point to many examples where smaller scale farms have, through bad management and/or a lack of funds, created considerable environmental damage.

I think you reveal your fragility on this issue by acknowledging that small farms can 'in theory' cause damage, but then argue that they are unlikely to as they will be organic and sell locally. This will not do. Organic farms may be more environmentally benign than their conventional counterparts, but they are

not immune from the laws of economics. They can only be justified if people are prepared to pay the higher costs of their food: larger scale farms will tend to be more productive than smaller counterparts.

Let me now turn to the two myths you introduced. Farming is ultimately 'just another industry', but this is not to condemn it to producing 'just another commodity'. On the contrary, if farmers are to increase their incomes they must find ways to add value to the commodities they produce.

Finally, I cannot believe you are seriously laying the blame for the increase in food-borne disease at the door of larger scale farms. Yes, I am sadly familiar with BSE, but I am unaware of any link to farm size. It is as fatuous for you to claim that modern food systems are generally damaging to health as it would be for me to argue that we all live longer because of modern food systems.

If you want a more environmentally friendly farming industry you must seek to separate myths from reality, and encourage the highest levels of efficiency in the production of food and the environment.

*Séan Rickard*

### **Dear Séan**

Bemused? Perplexed? Imagine how I feel, trying to square your interest in raising farmers' incomes with your enthusiasm for stripping the vast majority of their livelihood. Increased productivity leads to rising incomes? Hardly. Instead it depresses farmgate prices, especially when 'free trade' forces farmers to compete with the cheapest producers worldwide, and when prices are controlled by transnational agribusinesses. In America, for example, large-scale chicken producers are so 'productive' that the average farm produces 250,000 chickens a year; but the farmers only earn about five cents per bird, leaving their incomes well below the poverty line. Your solution, 'encouraging' still more farmers to abandon farming, is harsh tonic for those involved: the prospect of losing their farms is one reason suicide is now the leading cause of death among American farmers.

Does 'all the available data' really show large farms are more productive per hectare than small farms? Not at all. Even World Bank economists now agree that there is an inverse relationship between farm size and total farm output. Your focus on 'yields' of individual commodities, rather than total output, unfairly stacks the deck by ignoring a large measure of what smaller farms produce. While large farms are generally monocultures, smaller farms tend to be highly diversified: a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, for example, typically produces 40 or more different vegetables and herbs each season; in the South, small farmers often grow more than 100 different crops in the same plot. It is absurd to argue that a smaller farm producing corn, beans, squash, spinach, medicinal plants, animal fodder and 10 other products is less productive than a large corn monoculture – simply because it yields less corn per hectare. If you add up the value of all a farm's

products, you will find that total output per hectare drops as farm size increases.

I also disagree with your premise that larger farms are primarily the product of individual choices about 'efficiency'. More than anything else, today's trend toward larger farms is a consequence of government policies. Those policies consistently promote and subsidise global food – and therefore long-distance trade, transnational agribusinesses, and large monocultural farms. In that sense, yes, large farms, the increase in food-borne diseases, and BSE are linked, since all are products of the same highly industrialised and increasingly globalised food system.

Finally, your assertion that 'rational people will always choose efficiency as opposed to inefficiency' again reveals your western industrial bias. 'Efficiency' often conflicts with more fundamental concerns: family, community, the health of the land, enjoyment of one's work, and many others. Rational people the world over, particularly in traditional cultures, have found reason to attach greater importance to those values than to efficiency. Even in the US, farm-based societies like the Amish and the Mennonites choose from available technologies, rejecting some because they threaten community values, not because they fail to recognise labour-saving devices.

But if efficiency is what you seek, you won't find it in the global food system. Today, for example, your exalted 'laws of economics' are leading Britain to import and export nearly equal quantities of milk and other foods. Is it efficient for fleets of cargo ships, trucks and planes to carry the same commodities in opposite directions, wasting fossil fuels and adding to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions? Instead of subsidising the global food system, it would be far more sensible – and efficient – to shift support toward diversified production for more local and regional needs. A decrease in farm size would inevitably follow such a shift.

Steven Gorelick

### Dear Steven

The central issue between us is efficiency. Efficiency is the absence of waste. And no rational person favours waste. I realise we will have conflicting definitions of waste.

You dislike the link between productive efficiency and lower food prices. I welcome it. You believe farmers' welfare would be higher if the process of rising productivity did not apply to farming. I am convinced they would be poorer. You value a basic lifestyle. I doubt if society in general would value the inevitable fall in living standards.

You cannot turn your subjective beliefs into objective facts with the aid of small scale multiproduct farms. The value of vegetables per hectare is always greatly in excess of cereals. More relevant would be to compare productivity on large scale, specialist, horticultural enterprise with smaller, multiproduct farms. You might also reflect on why it is in developed nations that despite the lack of support, the bulk

of horticultural production is concentrated on larger scale enterprises.

Your *cri de coeur* about the benefits of removing subsidies from the global food system is at odds with your willingness to subsidise 'local' production. The effect might be to reduce the level of trade, and therefore its accompanying environmental costs, but if you believe it would lead to other than a waste of resources, minimum effort to improve products and systems and a loss of living standards for both farmers and their customers you have learnt very little from the post-war attempts to build sustainable industries behind protective barriers.

Perhaps it is too much to expect you to embrace my perspective on efficiency, but I remain convinced that it not only provides the means to more cheaply feed people, but also to find and exploit the technologies that will widen choice, raise living standards and reduce environmental damage.

Séan Rickard

### Dear Séan

The root of our disagreement is not about 'efficiency'. Our views diverged the moment you declared that ever larger farms result from 'fundamental forces', as though the laws of economics – like gravity or evolution – stem from Nature itself.

Those forces are, in fact, man-made, and emanate from numerous policy choices – not just agricultural policy but trade rules, transport policy, research priorities, and more. (When all those policies systematically favour the largest producers, you cannot claim that large horticultural farms suffer from 'lack of support').

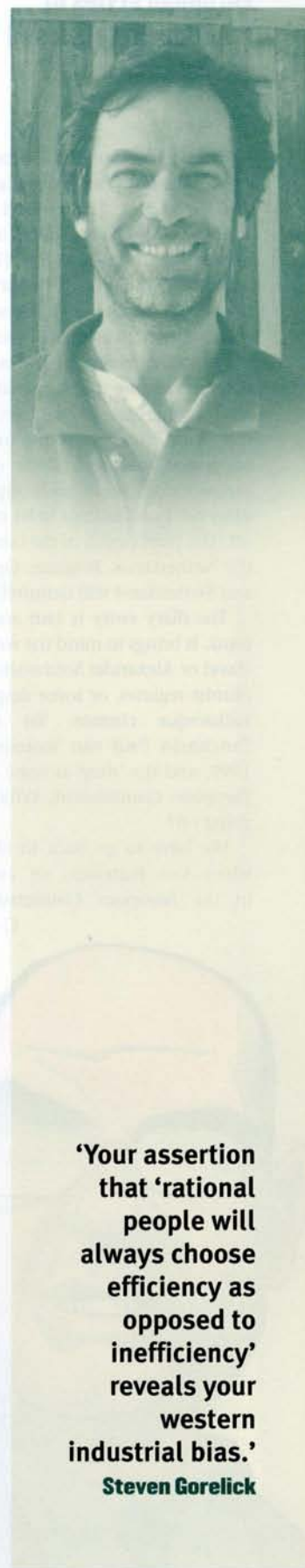
Policy choices should steer society in an appropriate direction. You believe the goal is to perpetually elevate 'living standards' – ie per capita income – which requires endless economic growth. Keep the global economic balloon expanding, the theory goes, and we are better off no matter what is sacrificed along the way.

But there is more to life than the ceaseless pursuit of consumer goods. Conventional economic thinking famously 'externalises' anything that can't be monetised – family, community, and the environment among them. It is the same logic that makes the price of food important, its quality irrelevant.

Ignoring important values is nothing new to mainstream economics, but this debate reveals just how much conjuring the model requires. As globalisation pulls hundreds of millions of self-reliant farmers off the land, they vanish – poof! – from your analysis, allowing you to argue that higher living standards among the few that survive prove that 'farmers' have benefited.

Sadly, most government policies are steered by such economic thinking. Amid discussions about the best way to add speed, we are all headed for a very steep cliff. Our direction will change only when enough people, seeing what lies ahead, demand it.

Steven Gorelick



**'Your assertion that 'rational people will always choose efficiency as opposed to inefficiency' reveals your western industrial bias.'**  
Steven Gorelick

**This month's heroes and villains: the contrasting European styles of Paul van Buitenen and Pascal Lamy.**

# THE GOOD

Today was one of the most difficult days of the last year,' reads the diary entry for 8 October. '[They] used all [their] persuasive powers on me to try to stop me from publishing the book as it is. [They] predicted hell and damnation if I continued with the book. I felt desperate. I phoned my publishing company to ask how much it would cost me to stop or postpone the publication of the book. Finally, after a few more phone calls, a talk with my wife, who fully supported me, and some quiet prayer, I realised that people were supporting me to carry on. I decided not to let myself be scared off. The publication of the book next week in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Switzerland will definitely go through!'

The diary entry is taut and nervous, but frank. It brings to mind the writings of Vaclav Havel or Alexander Solzhenitsyn under communist regimes, or some desperate soul in a Kafkaesque climate. Yet the writer is Dutchman Paul van Buitenen, the year is 1999, and the 'they' is none other than the European Commission. What on earth was going on?

We have to go back to December 1998, when van Buitenen, an assistant auditor in the European Commission's Financial

**C o n t r o l  
D i r e c t o r a t e,**  
sent a letter  
to Magda



Aelvoet, President of the Greens in the European Parliament. 'It is with deep regret that I write this letter to you,' he began. 'As Commission official, I am not allowed under the staff regulations to address myself directly to the European Parliament on internal Commission matters. This subject, however, appears to surpass what could normally be

## PAUL VAN BUITENEN

designated 'internal' since the credibility and future of the Commission is at stake.'

Over the course of 34 pages, van Buitenen outlined a litany of failures and poor management in the Commission's attempt to run a clean business. 'I have been in a "privileged position" to witness the incompetence and unwillingness of the Commission's administration to deal efficiently with fraud and irregularities,' he wrote, and thus it was that one of the most humiliating and revealing chapters of modern bureaucratic European history began.

His report showed that the Brussels-based Commission had deliberately covered up multi-million pound frauds; it had blocked inquiries into financial irregularities involving vast sums of taxpayers' money; it had removed mention of spending on fictitious projects from auditors' reports; it had mis-handled money across a broad spectrum of departments, from the tourism unit and vocational training section, to its humanitarian aid department and nuclear safety programme. Within days, international confidence in the European Commission's ability to handle the EU's £65 billion annual budget had crumbled.

The first reaction, of course, was to blame the messenger. Within a month of releasing his letter, van Buitenen was receiving threatening phone calls telling him not to reveal the details of the abuses. A report even came through that Commission security officers had been buying long-range sniper rifles with night sights and silencers, although this extraordinary development was later explained away as an anti-terrorism move. For days, van Buitenen was effectively the most wanted man in Europe, but as time passed it was becoming clear that the Commission's financial affairs would need to be independently examined.

By March 1999, the focus had shifted onto

the Commission, with an independent review concluding that van Buitenen's allegations carried legitimacy, and that 'it was not easy to find anyone in the Commission with a proper sense of responsibility'. The same month, the entire Commission resigned.

Van Buitenen had been suspended on half-pay during this time, but was reinstated by April. However, he found himself to be banned from further auditing tasks and reprimanded for his whistle-blowing. 'I considered leaving the Commission's services as I doubted whether there would still be a basis for me to continue my efforts to help improve the organisation from within,' he wrote. 'However, quite unexpectedly the previously anonymous support from many colleagues materialised in more visible form through my election as a staff representative with a high number of preferential votes. I decided to stay on board.' By September, the Committee of Independent Experts presented their final report: detailing its recommendations for a thorough administrative reform of the Commission.

Many might have considered van Buitenen vindicated by now, but the Commission hadn't finished, bringing us back to the hurdles they put up to block the publication of his book of the affair. Yet, inspired as he says above by family, friends and colleagues, van Buitenen went ahead, and in March 2000 the Commission unveiled its White Paper for internal reform.

Today, van Buitenen is considered a European hero: media outlets as diverse as Reader's Digest and the Australian Broadcasting Commission have honoured him as European of the Year.

Yet the true mark of the man is seen not in his courage or his unwillingness to give in, but in his refusal to let bitterness get in the way of his beliefs. Where some might have published their memoirs and run, van Buitenen is supporting the new professed ideals of those who once sought to destroy him. As he continues to work for a more transparent EU administration, his near-impossible desire to make the whole thing work shines through. 'The Commissioners in charge of reform have received the necessary background information to follow up on this issue' he wrote last year.

'They are of good will. I hope they will show the courage to act accordingly.'

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS BAYNE

# THE BAD

The European Commission? What exactly is that, then? One of those collections of faceless Brussels bureaucrats, isn't it? Pushing paper around and having expensive lunches – that sort of thing? A paper tiger, I've heard. Doesn't actually do anything. Does it?

One of the benefits of the vast, creaking structure that is the European Union is that it is so big, so complex, so elephantine and so, well, dull, that most people switch off as soon as it's mentioned. They might instinctively like or dislike it, but they don't know much, if anything, about how it actually works. Europhiles tend to lament this fact all the time. But it can be useful; particularly when the EU wants to do things which, if they actually knew about them, its citizens might not like very much at all.

Pascal Lamy undoubtedly finds it useful all the time; though he would, equally undoubtedly, deny this vehemently. Lamy is the EU's Trade Commissioner, and as such he is responsible for developing and representing the position of the EU on the global trading stage. In that role, he has become an enthusiastic promoter of the WTO, the world's biggest corporations and the razing of 'barriers' to their profits. Corporations and American trade negotiators, increasingly, love him. Environmentalists, small farmers and unions, increasingly, hate him. Most people, meanwhile, have never heard of him. And that seems to suit him just fine.

The 53-year-old Lamy was a controversial choice on his appointment in September 1999. A former French civil servant, banker and head of the private office of former EU President Jacques Delors, he was seen by some of the global economic elite as a potential danger to their interests. 'A typical French protectionist' grumbled some corporate bosses. 'No experience' muttered others. And some of Lamy's public words and gestures seemed to back them up – or at least indicate that here was a man who appreciated that the world's trade framework should not be drawn up by a handful of big, Western corporations, in order to serve their interests.

Lamy has always been good at creating a

public image (insofar as any European Commissioner can have a public image) of a concerned politician, who understands the importance of balancing trade with other, more permanent interests. Just listen to some of his public utterances. 'In short,' he said in a speech in Brussels last October last year, 'globalisation displays the three fundamental and indissociable features of market capitalism; efficiency, instability and unfairness.' 'What good is growth,' he went on to ask, 'if it is inadequately distributed and achieved by impoverishing... a sizeable minority?'

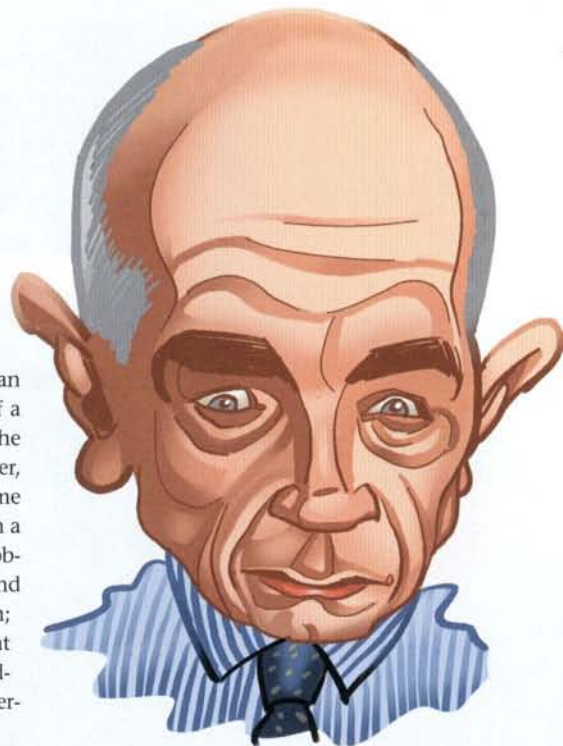
Lamy says such things all the time. After the Seattle debacle, he was heard to publicly criticise the WTO as a 'medieval' organisation, and to acknowledge that the protesters outside the conference hall were making some important

## PASCAL LAMY

points. He also believes, or so he says, in 'strong European governance... which does not, in my view, imply the creation of a superstate' in order to protect the European social model against unregulated global capitalism.

Sounds nice, doesn't it? So what's wrong with Lamy? What's wrong with him is that his warm words mask a history of distinctly icy deeds. For while the EU's trade commissioner can talk the talk, he has consistently walked the walk in completely the opposite direction – straight into the willing arms of the corporate beast.

Seattle is a good example. While Lamy was talking to the press about the importance of democracy and the validity of some of the protesters arguments, inside the meeting hall he was attempting to push through measures which would help the big biotech companies spread their GM foods around the world with very little resistance. Lamy tried to do a deal with the heavily pro-biotech US to undermine the global Biosafety Protocol that was being worked out to regulate global sales of GM products. And he might have succeeded had a group of environment ministers from various countries (including the UK's Michael Meacher) not



found out what he was up to and, with the help of their national trade negotiators, swiftly put a stop to it.

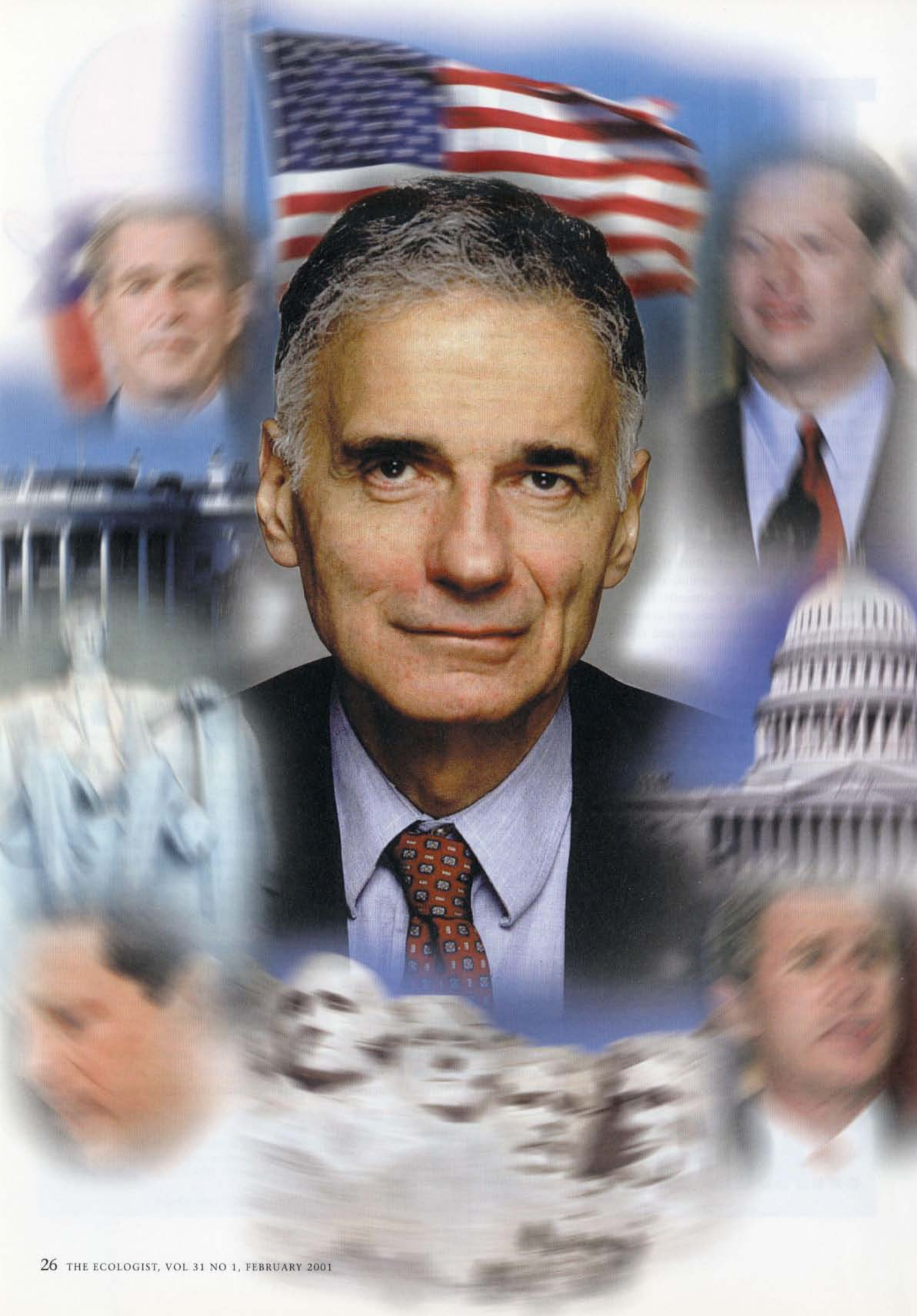
In the eyes of many greens, that was when Lamy's true colours were revealed. Since then, he's continued to act true to form; saying one thing and doing another. While he says that unregulated global capitalism is bad news, he's a key contact within the shadowy Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD), an informal network of European and American corporations, who make bilateral trade deals that aren't covered by global trade rules. At the recent Nice Summit he went all out to push through a form of 'fast track' negotiating power for the EU, which would allow him to do global trade deals on behalf of Europe without the specific consent of its member states.

Lamy, then, in reality, is an unreconstructed no-holds-barred corporate free trader. This is evidenced by the fact that his biggest hobby-horse at present is a determined push to launch a new round of trade talks, to take up where the Seattle collapse left off. He has, according to *The Economist*, 'notched up thousands of air miles' as he roams the world seeking to persuade 'developing' country governments in particular that a new round is just what they need. So far, many are unconvinced. But you have to admire his persistence. Undoubtedly his friends in the world's corporate boardrooms do. Those who really believe in the democracy, environmental protection and 'social models' he talks so much about, on the other hand, may not be so impressed.

## ...AND THE UGLY

'I shall go to the European summit in Nice. I shall insist that effective decision-making is a condition for enlarging the union. This has nothing to do with common taxes. It has everything to do with common sense for the benefit of business and of all Europe's citizens.'

*Romano Prodi, president of the EU commission*



# MR NADER GOES TO WASHINGTON

**Ralph Nader has been accused of costing Al Gore the White House. He has been called a crusader, an egotist, a hero and a fool.**

**Zac Goldsmith lets him speak for himself.**

**W**ednesday 7 November 2000 was the day American politics changed. As the result of the country's Presidential election unfolded, the media had a field day; making predictions, retracting them, declaring results, retracting them, passing judgement, apologising. The rest of the world sniggered at the sight of the self-proclaimed 'world's greatest democracy' making a pig's ear of its electoral process.

In the end, as we all know, it went down to the wire. The votes of fewer than 500 people raised Republican Bush above Democrat Gore. 500 of the 100 million or so who had voted. Bush, thanks to the courts and a conveniently-placed relative, went to the White House. But the slightest tremor in voter behaviour would have tipped the scale.

Someone had to be blamed. And vengeful Democrats, not in the mood to examine their own failings or blame their own candidate for his own defeat, found themselves a whipping boy that everyone could unite against: Ralph Nader.

Nader, leader of America's previously invisible Green Party, gained 97,000 votes in Florida.

Democrats, blithely assuming that those votes would otherwise have gone to Gore, are still fuming. 'Nader cost us the presidency,' cried one member of Gore's team. 'He's never going to be forgiven for that.' Even some environmental organisations condemned him. 'The public interest community is going to have to spend tens of millions of dollars a year for the next four years playing defence', said Ken Cook, director of the Environmental Working Group. 'There's an old labour song: Which side are you on?' wrote John Sweeney, President of the AFL-CIO, 'We think Nader clearly was on the wrong side.'

Phew. And then there was the media. *The New York Times* launched a hysterical campaign against Nader even before the election, claiming that he was cluttering the field for the big boys, undermining democracy and embarking on 'a self-indulgent crusade'. Following the election, they invited analyst Tom Friedman to comment on the results. 'My only hope', he wrote, 'is that no mat-

ter who wins, he will name Nader the first US Ambassador to North Korea. That way Nader can spend his days with another egomaniacal narcissist.'

During the campaign, particularly as things looked set to become a close contest, the anti-Nader bandwagon took a dive into the squalid, with Democrats suggesting both that he was gay (what will the First 'Lady' look like?, they sneered,) and that he was a hypocrite, with millions of dollars stashed away in hidden accounts. The man who had set out to expose the wrongs and weaknesses of the political system had become, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Washington Establishment's Public Enemy Number One.

## AMERICA'S MOST WANTED

Meet Ralph Nader, America's most controversial citizen. The man who, depending on who you talk to, put Bush into the White House, made the Green Party a real political force and – incontrovertibly – brought a radical, anti-corporate citizens' agenda up from the underground and on to the public stage. Those who know, or know of, Nader, can't have been surprised. For this is a man who has made a habit of standing up for the little people against the big interests. A man who has made a career out of being, as he would put it, a Citizen – with a capital 'C'.

Ralph Nader was born in Connecticut in 1934 to Lebanese immigrant parents. He studied law at Harvard, but abandoned his conventional law practice at the age of 29 and hitchhiked to Washington with one suitcase to begin a career change that would change his life – and change America. He started by examin-

ing the issue of car safety, work which resulted in the publication in 1965 of a bestselling book, *Unsafe At Any Speed*, which accused the car industry of deliberately building unsafe cars to turn in a profit. When General Motors attacked him he sued them, and his action led to drastic law changes promoting car safety.

After that, there was no stopping him. He became a full-time consumer advocate, holding corporations to account on behalf of ordinary people. Activists flooded to Washington to work with him; they became known as 'Nader's Raiders'. He founded the activist group Public Citizen and the magazine *Multinational Monitor*. He has launched campaigns against insurance companies, labour laws, 'corporate welfare' and the framework of the global trading system. 🐾

**'Gore is so deceptive because he appears to be a friend. He understands what needs to be done. Yet he still refuses to take any real action. That makes him worse. He neutralises the green movement. He is an anaesthetic. At least under Bush, the movement will be awakened... stimulated.'**

✦ He has been responsible for numerous law changes in favour of consumers, and has frightened endless corporate bosses into belated good behaviour. He is responsible, according to former US Senator James Abourezk, for creating 'for the first time in US history, a movement... whose sole purpose is to keep large corporations and the government honest' – virtually singlehandedly.

#### RALPH VS OZONE MAN

It's quite a CV. And now he has topped it all by running for President. But why now? Why, after all these years, stand in an election where one candidate – Al Gore, the great green, 'ozone man', author of *Earth in the Balance* – seems genuinely to offer answers. Why cripple the chances of the most environmentally-minded candidate ever to stand a chance of winning the Presidency?

It's because, he tells me, it isn't true. 'Gore is engaged in weekly makeovers. I would not trust him. Look, he was in charge of the environmental portfolio for eight years. Clinton gave that to him. It was a powerful portfolio, and yet he surrendered to one industry after another. His rhetoric has been great, but the gap between what he says and what he has done has been staggering. The truth is, he really doesn't believe in anything other than his political career. He surrendered to the motor industry on fuel efficiency, to the biotech industry, to the chemical industry. He was bad on toxics in the workplace, and above all, he is responsible for pushing through the inherently anti-environmental NAFTA and WTO agendas. In fact,' he goes on, breathlessly, 'in eight years under Clinton and Gore, not one chemical control regulation was issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Agency. That's never happened before under either Republicans or Democrats.'

I get the point. 'Why Gore is so deceptive', he continues, 'is because he appears to be a friend. He understands what needs to be done, as we saw from his book, *Earth in the Balance*. Yet he still refuses to take any real action. That makes him worse. He neutralises the green movement. He is an anaesthetic. At least under Bush, the movement will be awakened... stimulated.'

#### ENEMIES WITHIN?

But if all this is true, why have even some of Nader's erstwhile allies turned on him? Why did Friends of the Earth US and the Sierra Club, amongst others, declare against Nader and for Gore? Why is it rumoured that some unions and environmental groups are even threatening to boycott Nader's creations, some of the most effective environmental organisations in the land, like Public Citizen, for instance? 'We call these people the frightened liberals, or well-intentioned cowards,' he answers. 'Basically, they are prepared, every four years, to settle for less and less, simply because less and less is not as bad as the worst. The vote for least worst legitimises the least worst.'

Maybe. But the rifts that have been created appear, at least on the surface, to be serious. 'Let the voters who said there's no difference between Bush and Gore wait until Big Oil's in the White House', declares the Environmental Working Group. 'Bush is going to take those Greens to school and we're all going to pay the tuition.' Does this worry him?

'Well, next time these groups need help, I don't think they're going to turn their backs on Public Citizen, because they're going to need Public Citizen more than Public Citizen needs them. And if we are going to win the battle, we need to work together.' Is that likely? 'Some will. Some won't. Some quite simply are irrevocably petty.'

It has been said on more than one occasion that a clever Nader would have approached Gore before the campaigns began, with the aim of brokering a deal, accepting a position in a Gore administration, mining agreements from the Democrats and so on. Did this

occur to him? 'No. First of all I would never betray the hard working people who supported our candidacy, both greens and independents, and second, I don't trust him. Whatever agreements we could reach would be unenforceable. Say he agreed to pull out of GATT and renegotiate a 'pull up' trade pact. How could I keep him to his word?'

Such a deal would probably have made more sense for Gore, whose assumed monopoly of the green vote was fast dissolving. Did Gore ever seek to build a bridge? 'They put out feelers. Intermediaries for the Democrats wondered if I would accept a high level position. On other occasions, prominent Democrats in Congress tried to set up a meeting'. Did it ever happen? 'I was trying to meet with him for four years and he refused. Why am I going to meet with him now? The only possible reason I would meet with him is to have him concede his votes to us, and he wasn't about to do that. There's no trusting the man at all. The American people have seen him for what he is.'

#### TWO SIDES OF THE COIN

According to Nader, the Democrats are no better than the Republicans – at least not significantly. This is his key argument, but it flies in the face of what most environmentalists probably hold to be true. So I ask him; are American greens wrong to align themselves with the Democrats? Should they not seek, as in many ways he will have done, to massage them further towards the green position? Will we not then see an honest divide between two parties offering genuinely different policy packages?

'No. I think what we are seeing is something strange. Take corporate globalisation for instance. A significant number of Democrats and a significant number of Republicans are sceptical, in similar numbers. It no longer cuts along party lines. Clinton for instance found greater support for his WTO agenda through the Republicans than he did through Democrats.'

Nader insists that most people are slow to grasp how politics has changed; how the battle ground today 'is no longer left/right. It is top/down. This is what we have been trying to explain throughout our campaign. And that is why a lot of conservatives found our message congenial. They don't like seeing a massive diversion of public money into corporate subsidies, the hand-out of natural resources, the bail-out of banks, the distribution of governmental pharmaceutical research to the big drug companies who can then charge what they like. They no more support corporate welfare than the left. Nor do they support the commercialisation of all things... childhood, religion, education, politics. No matter what you call yourself – conservative, moderate, liberal, radical – you are affected as a human being by the brunt of abuse of corporate power. Conservatives don't like drinking contaminated water, dying of cancer, seeing their taxes wasted. The similarities are limited of course. On certain social issues, like abortion and so on, they remain quite distinct.'

So what then will Nader say when he is blamed for all the atrocities that Bush will inevitably endorse over the next four years? What will he say when Bush grants oil drilling licenses in Alaska?

'I'll point to the Clinton/Gore performance in the Hague. I'll point to the architecture of WTO and NAFTA. I'll point out that Gore, who was big in his book on solar energy, never lifted a finger. We begged him to make one major policy speech on solar energy but he never did. He turned his back on the people of East Liverpool, Ohio, whom he had promised in 1992 to protect against a giant incinerator. He assured them it would never be built. It was, and within a year the mercury levels in the blood tested of the elementary school children who went to school 1,100 feet from the incinerator doubled. The list is endless.'

'You have to remember,' he says, his voice quickening, 'that if Bush senior had won in 1992, it's the widespread consensus here that we

**'Nader insists that most people are slow to grasp how politics has changed; how the battle ground today "is no longer left/right. It is top/down".'**

would never have seen NAFTA or GATT. It is because of that snakecharmer, William Jefferson Clinton, who managed to split the Democratic Party, that consensus on NAFTA was achieved. The Democrats who would have refused to sign up under a Republican were smooth-talked into it by Clinton.'

#### THE LONGER VIEW

Nader may well have changed the nature of American politics. He will forever be held responsible by bitter Democrats for their defeat, and he will forever be credited for having brought issues to the table that would never have been addressed without him. But what, I ask him, was his ultimate goal? 'To win, of course.' But he must have known he wouldn't. What did he really want? And why does he think politicians of both parties won't provide it?

'First,' he says, 'money is still a determinative issue. He who pays the piper calls the tune. Politicians too are often ill-informed. GATT is a good example. The media, together with the Clinton Administration and the corporate lobbyists, presented the agreement as little more than a means of reducing unnecessary trade barriers. It was presented as a battle between old-line protectionists and up-to-date free traders. But what we found was that not a single member of Congress or staff had actually read the 800-page document. They had been given summaries by US trade representatives. This is an agreement that has 139 nation members where the corporations write the rules. We tried to inform the media, but with little success. On the whole, they blacked us out.'

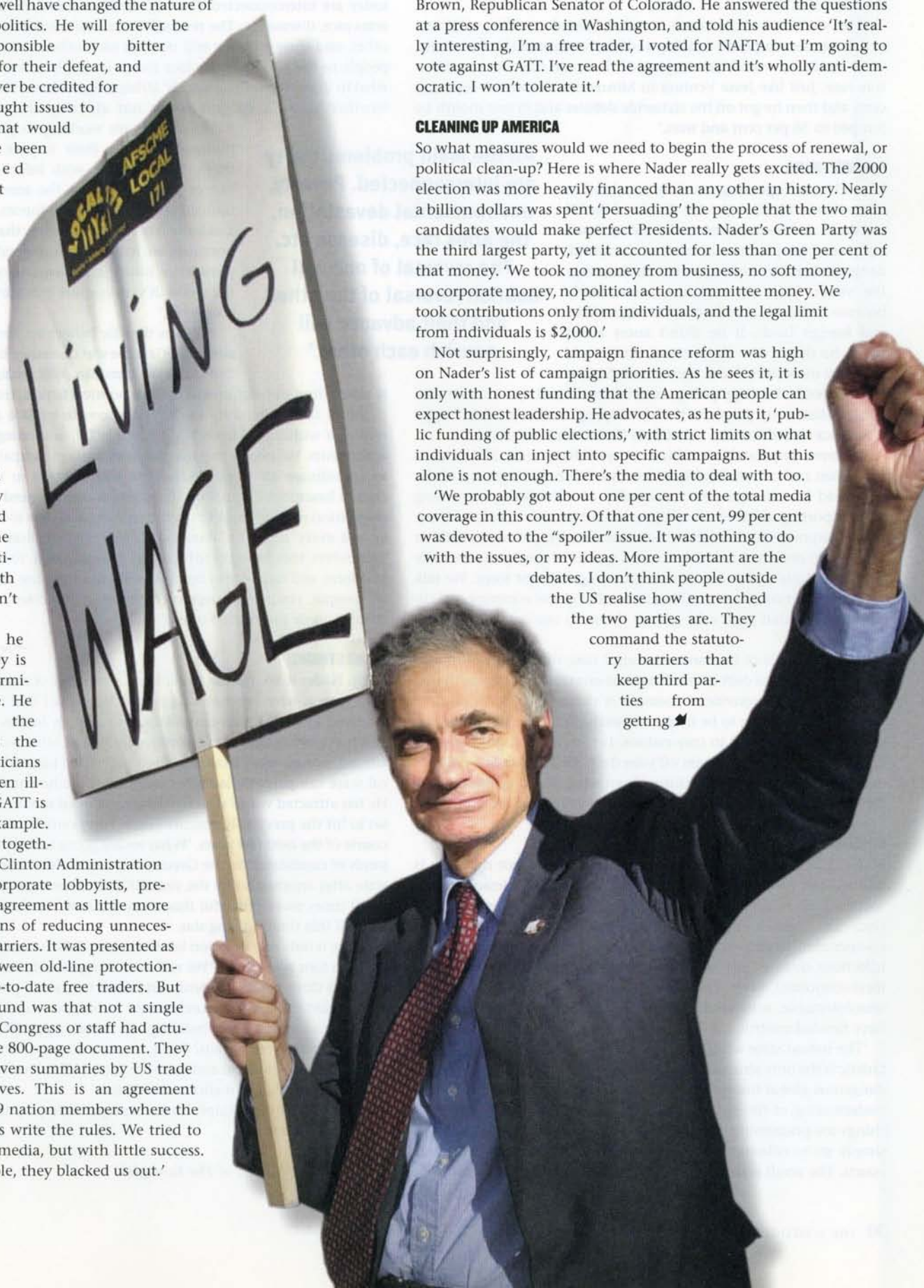
Eventually Nader's message did make it into the media, but only after he thought up an imaginative stunt. To prove his point, he threw down the gauntlet in Congress before their vote on the GATT. He offered to give \$10,000 to the favourite charity of any member of Congress willing to sign an affidavit saying he or she had read the agreement, and then answer 10 simple questions on its contents in public. Only one man eventually came forward. His name was Hank Brown, Republican Senator of Colorado. He answered the questions at a press conference in Washington, and told his audience 'It's really interesting, I'm a free trader, I voted for NAFTA but I'm going to vote against GATT. I've read the agreement and it's wholly anti-democratic. I won't tolerate it.'

#### CLEANING UP AMERICA

So what measures would we need to begin the process of renewal, or political clean-up? Here is where Nader really gets excited. The 2000 election was more heavily financed than any other in history. Nearly a billion dollars was spent 'persuading' the people that the two main candidates would make perfect Presidents. Nader's Green Party was the third largest party, yet it accounted for less than one per cent of that money. 'We took no money from business, no soft money, no corporate money, no political action committee money. We took contributions only from individuals, and the legal limit from individuals is \$2,000.'

Not surprisingly, campaign finance reform was high on Nader's list of campaign priorities. As he sees it, it is only with honest funding that the American people can expect honest leadership. He advocates, as he puts it, 'public funding of public elections,' with strict limits on what individuals can inject into specific campaigns. But this alone is not enough. There's the media to deal with too.

'We probably got about one per cent of the total media coverage in this country. Of that one per cent, 99 per cent was devoted to the "spoiler" issue. It was nothing to do with the issues, or my ideas. More important are the debates. I don't think people outside the US realise how entrenched the two parties are. They command the statutory barriers that keep third parties from getting' ✎



on the ballot without an extraordinary effort in many states. Through their hoked-up debate commission they are able to deny third party candidates access to the Khyber Pass. It is through the debates that candidates can reach a massive number of people. If you don't get on those debates you can campaign as we did in 50 states, often several times over, and you can do that for 20 years and you won't reach a fraction of the 45-90 million people who have watched these debates.'

If the election had been fairly handled, I wonder, with equal access to debates, less corporate funding and better treatment by the media, what would he have expected? 'It would have been a three-way race. Just like Jesse Ventura in Minnesota. He was at eight per cent, and then he got on the statewide debates and in one month he jumped to 38 per cent and won.'

## FOREIGN FIELDS

I found myself speaking, recently, to a Muslim subscriber to *The Ecologist*. We discussed the US elections, and he surprised me by saying that a number of people from his part of the world, Bangladesh, had been happy to see Bush emerge the victor. This, he explained, was simply because of Bush's ignorance of foreign affairs and foreign lands. If he didn't know about them, he didn't care about them, and would therefore most likely leave them alone. Such is the nature of US foreign policy, even where dressed up as humanitarianism, that many people in the 'developing' world would be happy if America ceased to exist. What does Nader think about this?

'We need desperately to rethink many of these terms, like humanitarianism and national defence,' he says. 'We have to get out of the post-Cold War foreign policy mentality of militarising everything and supporting dictators who happen to cut lucrative deals with our global corporations. We talk of national security, yet we do little or nothing to prevent the incidence and spread of deadly diseases like TB and malaria which are returning in drug-resistant force. We talk of defence, yet do almost nothing to combat global warming and climate change that pose a far greater threat to our nation than any human enemy.'

On the subject of humanitarianism, I raise the subject of Jubilee 2000's campaign of debt relief. 'That's the one thing that scares them,' he says. 'They've convinced themselves that if they don't do debt relief there are going to be huge upheavals. But there's another reason. Debt relief is tied to concessions. Let in the IMF, give us some concessions, and we'll let you off your debt. Thirdly, when a nation's debt is down they are ripe for future borrowing. The taxpayers relieve the counties of the debt and then the banks can loan more money.'

## CONNECTIONS

Nader is uncategorisable. He is not truly left. He is not right. He is perhaps not even a radical. In fact, talking to him is a lesson in perspectives. He is fundamentally critical of corporate-driven globalisation, but sees a value in 'civic globalisation' – international co-operation to deal with international issues like climate change, infectious diseases and so on. He believes in decentralisation and local economics, yet he sees the need for reclaiming power from the unaccountable, unelected global institutions to which politicians have handed control.

'The nation state which was so reviled decades ago as being militaristic is the only structure that has the power to defend people from dangerous global forces,' he insists. 'In fact, we need to reverse the undermining of the nation state through bodies like the WTO. As things are progressing, companies and their governmental puppets simply go to tribunals in Geneva and sidestep our courts or your courts. The result is that a nation's health and safety standards have

to go through WTO harmonisation committees that are secret and will often result in harmonisation downward. We have open courts, for instance – the tribunals are closed. We have public transcripts – they don't in the tribunals. We have independent appeals – they don't in the WTO. This is fundamentally contrary to our democratic process.'

It all comes down, he says, to connections. All the main problems today are interconnected. Poverty, environmental devastation, the arms race, disease etc. The reversal of one will nourish reversal of the other, and their advance will nourish each other. One way to alert people to the real issues we face today, is simply to ask them to list what in their view are the worlds' 10 biggest problems. Then ask them whether global corporations are not affecting the situation, or whether they are working to prevent those problems, reduce their impact, or worsen them. You can start with infectious disease, cancer, global warming, the arms traffic, dictatorships, poverty, the forests, whatever. Suddenly it becomes very clear that global corporations are highly dysfunctional to the finer pursuits of justice and elementary fairness in the world. It's really quite extraordinary to see it operate.'

But how does he believe we are going to be able to initiate the sort of change he advocates; this is the key question. Will change eventually

result from popular pressure, from political action, from protest?

'All of them,' he says. 'We have to press to initiate a six-month notice of withdrawal from NAFTA and WTO, and renegotiate trade agreements. We need a massive public education campaign; we need to co-ordinate all those discussions taking place in union halls, church basement discussions, universities etc. We need to strengthen political movements like the Green Party. It all has to come together and every time the abuses of corporate globalisation manifest themselves, they have got to be widely disseminated. To feed this river of reform and recovery of our government under the sovereignty of the people, you cannot repeat these things too often, speak about them in more forums too often.'

## GOING STRONG

Ralph Nader is 66. He has never been a member of a political party, ('the reason why I'm not a registered Green is I don't want to be involved in inter-Green-party disputes') though he has shaken one and brought another into prominence. He has attracted, with virtually no money, more than 3 million voters. He has endured hysterical scare campaigns – launched even by those he considered allies. He has attracted voters who had never intended to vote, and he is all set to lift the previously obscure Green Party onto a new level in the course of the next few years. 'What we are going to do is recruit thousands of candidates. So the Green party can build a solid base in one state after another, so by the year 2002 the Green party will be five to 10 times more powerful than they are now.' He is still, it seems, after all this time, a rising star.

There is only one question left to ask him. Will he run for President again in four years time? 'We will be making the relevant announcements in three years.' Suddenly, an indirect answer. I press him. Will you remain the Party's figurehead for as long as necessary? 'Yes, I'll remain involved in Party building'. So there's a possibility that you could carry the torch again? 'Well, we want to see a lot more leadership coming out at local and State levels and I think we helped invigorate some of the green efforts abroad too.'

It seems that even Ralph Nader is prepared to play the politician when he wants to. ♦

Zac Goldsmith is editor of *The Ecologist*.

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STILL PICTURES

# ORGANICISED CRIME

**The backlash against organic food has begun. But who is behind it?  
 Andy Rowell uncovers a global network of naysayers putting the boot into  
 healthy food – and profiting from it.**

**T**he organic food movement is a modern success story. Although still small in comparison to conventional food producers, it is growing at a rate of 40 per cent a year in the UK alone. The popularity of organic food is so high that demand is outstripping supply. It is chemical-free, wildlife-friendly and popular with consumers.

So what was the head of the Food Standards Agency doing attacking it?

Appearing on BBC TV last August, Sir John Krebs, the head of the newly-formed FSA<sup>1</sup> – the government organisation whose aim 'is to make sure the food you eat is safe, and to offer independent, balanced advice' – said bluntly that consumers buying organic food were 'not getting value for money, in my opinion and in the opinion of

the FSA, if they think they are buying extra nutritional quality or extra nutritional safety, because we don't have the evidence'.<sup>2</sup> The media reported his comments widely.

Why had Krebs decided to put the boot into organic food, when more serious issues such as genetically modified crops and BSE were lying unresolved on Britain's dinner plates? Interestingly, though Krebs' intervention angered many food campaigners and organic producers, other were unsurprised. For this was not the first time that Sir John had spoken out against sustainable food and farming, and implicitly in defence of the status quo.

Harry Hadaway from the Soil Association, the UK's biggest organic certification body, said that Krebs was 'a historic supporter of GM

foods.<sup>3</sup> Alan Simpson, MP, a longtime opponent of biotechnology, went further. 'It was always predictable that there would be a backlash targeted against organics,' he said. 'There is so much money at stake in agribusiness and biotech, it was certain to lash out at anything that threatened continuous profits. The only thing that surprises me is that the FSA have joined in the kicking... I just didn't think they would be so susceptible to the corporate food lobby.'

Simpson is not the only one saying such things. For it seems increasingly clear that Krebs' attack on organic food was only the most prominent example in the UK so far of a growing reactionary movement in the world of food – the corporate and agribusiness backlash against organics.

### CATCHING KREBS

Sir John Krebs has taken controversial stances before. Whilst at the Natural Environmental Research Centre, his previous job, he advocated the deep-sea dumping of Shell's Brent Spar oil platform.<sup>4</sup> He also designed controversial tests, known as 'the Krebs experiments', to investigate whether badgers are responsible for increasing incidences of TB in cattle. These experiments will lead to the slaughter of 20,000 badgers, according to the National Federation of Badger Groups (NFBG) and have provoked considerable criticism.<sup>5</sup>

Some say that the way Krebs worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on what many believe to be a 'flawed' experiment with badgers, showed that he was willing to toe the line with a Ministry reviled by many food campaigners and environmentalists. Whether this helped the government decide on his appointment or not, he had certainly shown himself to be unsympathetic to concerns about GM foods long before he joined the FSA, dismissing criticisms as 'shrill, often ill-informed and dogma-driven'. He even went as far as endorsing GM foods on the day of the announcement of his appointment to the FSA, when he told the BBC that GM products 'were as safe as their non-GM counter-products'.<sup>6</sup>

### JOINING THE SIRC-US

If Krebs' record already looked less than impartial, he was about to add to the concerns. Shortly after joining the FSA, Krebs also aligned himself with an Oxford-based organisation known as SIRC, the Social Issues Research Centre, which has set itself up as an arbiter of what is good and bad in the journalistic reporting of health and science stories. In September 2000, SIRC issued a set of 'Guidelines on Science and Health Communication' in partnership with the Royal Institution. SIRC's avowed remit – to promote fair and accurate reporting in the media on science and health matters – sounds laudable. But a closer look at SIRC's work shows that it appears to be, in reality, an attempt to encourage media reports supportive of corporate science and technology, such as genetic engineering, and condemn reports of research seen as problematic for corporate interests.

SIRC maintains a pro-biotech position, 'taking into account the potential benefits of GM technology in disadvantaged areas of the world'.<sup>7</sup> SIRC's funding comes from its 'sister organisation, MCM Research', but also The Ministry of Defence, several large food companies, and the drinks industry front organisation, the Portman Group. It shares offices, directors and key personnel with MCM Research, a PR company whose client list reads like a Who's Who of the international drinks industry, and Conoco, the oil company.

The *British Medical Journal* has questioned what an organisation that is so closely aligned to the drinks industry is doing setting guidelines for journalists.<sup>8</sup>

### THE WIDER VIEW

Krebs, SIRC, the FSA... it would be easy to attack such organisations and individuals for their anti-organic stance, but they fit into a much more worrying broader picture. Professor of Food Policy at Thames Valley University, Tim Lang says he feels that Krebs was 'being set up to say things he doesn't believe and the evidence doesn't warrant'.<sup>9</sup>

But set up by whom?

The real question is, has Krebs and the FSA fallen victim to a long-standing campaign by agribusiness in both America and the UK to undermine organic agriculture? Was he being set up by the agribusiness exponents who had moved so forcefully from MAFF into the fledgling Food Standards Agency. Was he part of those forces himself? And why is the attack on organic food increasingly a well-organised, well-funded and international effort?

To understand the answer, it's necessary to understand not only what organic agriculture stands for, but what it stands against. The organic movement, based on a pesticide-free philosophy, seeks a more sustainable and holistic agricultural system; one which is fundamentally opposed to biotechnology, the science which the world's giant agribusiness corporations are frantically developing. Organic agriculture, which promises consumers a 'non-GM product', is the biggest obstacle in the way of the biotech revolution.

### THE TWO-PRONGED ATTACK

'Agribusiness companies were perfectly happy to ignore organics when it was a tiny niche market,' says Jeanette Longfield from Sustain, the UK alliance for better food and farming. 'Now it is no longer a niche market, they are clearly thinking it is going to have an impact on profits and they had better do something'.

That 'something' is an increasingly ruthless attempt to destroy the organic movement. 'The agribusiness companies are taking a two-pronged attack' says John Stauber, from *PR Watch*, an investigative quarterly in the US (see [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org)). 'Firstly, big businesses are buying up organic processors and marketers to reap the higher profits of the fastest growing food segment in the US. Secondly, at the same time, these companies are blasting the integrity of organics through their PR front groups. It's a brilliant 'win/win' strategy for business. They get to hide behind [such front groups] and at the same time, they are moving to control the organic food industry so that any profits will go to them'.

In the UK, the strategy is similar. So while a spokesperson for biotech corporation Novartis says, 'I think the FSA were completely right in what they were saying in that organic food is no more nutritious than conventionally grown food', other biotech companies refuse to question organic, as they are more interested in co-opting the movement for themselves.

'In principle, the aims and objectives of the people who are producing organic foods is very similar to ours,' says Professor Howard Slater, a spokesperson for CropGen, a pro-biotech umbrella group. 'Organic farmers are trying to reduce the

inputs into modern agrochemical practice... To a large extent that is a major plank of the GM crop objective. We would be very keen to see organic farming take on some of the

GM crops that are beginning to become available and to use them within their regime.' ❖

## 'Sir John Krebs, head of the Food Standards Agency, has dismissed criticisms of GM foods as "shrill, often ill-informed and dogma-driven".'

## 'Organic agriculture, which promises consumers a 'non-GM product', is the biggest obstacle in the way of the biotech revolution.'



Both strategies will lead – quite deliberately – to the undermining of the organic symbol. The implications are clear, says Dr Ben Mepham, from the Food Ethics Council. ‘One of the dangers for the organic movement is the appropriation of its ideology by big business and I think that is happening... The word organic may not mean that much soon.’

In these efforts, the agribusiness and biotech corporations are supported by a loose network of think-tanks, both in the US and in the UK. To an unsuspecting eye, these think-tanks appear to offer a veneer of independence from the big businesses which plough billions of dollars into their bank accounts to push forward a deregulatory, pro-high-tech, corporate agenda.

#### ANYONE FOR DENNIS?

So who are the main characters involved? If all roads lead to Rome, then Dennis Avery is the most famous gladiator in the Coliseum; he is the source of many of today's myths about organic food. Author of the inspirational-titled *Saving the Planet with Pesticides and Plastic: The Environmental Triumph of High-Yield Farming*, Avery sees himself as a missionary, promoting the hi-tech farming industries: pesticides, irradiation, factory farming, and the newcomer: biotechnology. Unsurprisingly, he is also a keen free-trader.<sup>10</sup> That he ‘welcomed’ Krebs’ ‘well-considered’ attack on organic foods tells us much about him.

Avery, a former agricultural analyst for the US State Department during the Reagan era, is now Director of the Centre for Global Food Issues, which is part of the Hudson Institute, a right-wing US think-tank. Avery's message is simple: organic food takes up too much land, and is actually dangerous for you. The growth in organic agriculture is due to an ‘image created by the environmental movement’. Presumably unlike GM, it is a ‘gigantic marketing lie’. Avery believes it would take an extra 10 million square miles of land if the world was to go organic, making it the ‘largest existing threat to wildlife habitat’.

Avery's defence of agribusiness sometimes borders on the absurd. ‘The people pushing organics the hardest’ he says, ‘seem to believe that the world is overpopulated. Are they trying to force us into an organic-farming strait-jacket, so that they can then say that the world has too many people, we must have forced abortions... are they trying to back us into a corner where inhuman solutions will be accepted?’

Having dismissed organic food, Avery turns his attentions to the wonders of biotechnology. ‘Genetically modified foods,’ he says, ‘are significantly safer than organic and natural foods. Over the last decade, consumers have eaten millions of pounds of genetically altered foods, and millions of tons of feed corn and soybean meal have been used to produce our meat and milk. So far, not even a skin rash has been linked to these new-tech foods’.<sup>11</sup>

**‘We would be very keen to see organic farming take on some of the GM crops that are beginning to become available and to use them within their regime.’ – Professor Howard Slater, CropGen biotechnology group**

Harry Hadaway, for the Soil Association points out how ‘scientifically unsound’ such statements are. ‘The UN recently put a report out saying that GM in agriculture was unnecessary to feed the world,’ he points out. But the nub of the issue is clear: ‘The protagonists of GM and those involved in the Hudson Institute are keen to promote the use of any technology which will improve the financial position of the companies backing them.’

Avery dismisses critics who point out the funding of the Hudson Institute by agrochemical companies. Commenting on the Hudson's funding sources he laughs: ‘If the major criticism they can offer is that the Hudson Institute gets money from farm input companies, that's pretty weak criticism. I am not bought. I am a missionary.’ This said, the Hudson's Board includes James Dowling from PR firm Burson-Marsteller, and Craig

Fuller, an ex-Philip Morris Executive who led the PR firm Hill & Knowlton's front organisation during the Gulf War called ‘Citizens for a Free Kuwait’.<sup>12</sup> Both Burson-Marsteller and Hill and Knowlton have a history of working against environmental activists.<sup>13</sup> Hudson's funder's include many companies behind the agribusiness and biotech revolution: Ciba-Geigy (now Novartis), Cargill, Dow Elanco, DuPont, and Monsanto.<sup>14</sup>

#### WIDENING THE CIRCLE

As the attacks on organic food increased, so others at the Hudson Institute joined Avery in his anti-organic fight. Other officials at its Centre for Global Food Studies include Avery's son and Dave Juday, who also coincidentally works for World Perspectives Inc, whose clients include, amongst others, ‘major grain and oilseed trading companies, processors, food companies, financial institutions, trade associations, and multilateral development banks’.<sup>15</sup>

In America, Avery's message has also been picked up widely by other organisations, most prominently the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) and the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition. The ACSH is run by Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, regarded as one of the top 50 ‘heroes’ of the anti-environmental, pro-industry ‘Wise Use’ movement in the US. She too is on a ‘crusade’ against the ‘toxic terrorists’ of the organic movement. ‘I am furious when I see the manner in which these terrorists take on and destroy the people who are feeding this country,’ she says.<sup>16</sup> Before they stopped revealing their funding sources, ACSH used to receive some 50 per cent of their funding from corporations and foundations, including the Coors Foundation, Monsanto, Shell, Ciba-Geigy, Exxon, Du Pont and Union Carbide.

‘The interests of her benefactors inevitably raises some questions’, writes Howard Kurtz in *The Colombia Journalism Review*, ‘Could there be any connection between Whelan's



**Tea and sympathy?:** Sir John Krebs, head of the Food Standards Agency



defence of saccharin, and funding from Coca-Cola, the PepsiCo Foundation, the NutraSweet Company and the National Soft Drink Association? Her praise for fast food and grants from Burger King?... Her defence of hormones in cows and backing from the National Dairy Council and American Meat Institute?<sup>17</sup>

The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition's (TASSC) membership was also heavily corporate-backed, listing some 400 members including Amoco, Chevron, Dow Chemical, General Motors, Lorillard tobacco, Philip Morris, Procter & Gamble and WR Grace and Company. Set up in 1993, supposedly as a coalition to promote 'sound science,' TASSC was actually formed by Philip Morris to debunk the link between second-hand tobacco smoke and cancer, although considerable effort was made to hide this from the public.<sup>18</sup>

In 1997, Steven Milloy became TASSC's Executive Director. Since 1998, TASSC has not been active, and Milloy has turned his attention to running web pages, which attack environmentalists and organic agriculture: [www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com), [www.nomorescares.com](http://www.nomorescares.com) and [www.consumerdistorts.com](http://www.consumerdistorts.com). He is also an 'adjunct scholar' with the right-wing libertarian Cato Institute. Based in Washington, Cato receives funding from oil, tobacco, pharmaceutical, agricultural and biotechnology companies. Rupert Murdoch sits on the board. Amongst the Institute's curious opinions is that smoking-related deaths are 'purely statistical artefacts'.

### CROSSING THE OCEAN

The anti-organic backlash is part of a wider, international anti-environmental movement. There is a cross-pollination of people, ideas and articles between America and like-minded think-tanks and academic institutions overseas in Europe and the UK. In August last year, Milloy launched a new 'No More Scares' campaign in Washington, promoting a new web-site, [www.nomorescares.com](http://www.nomorescares.com) and a book called *The Fear Profiteers*. A month later the No More Scares campaign launched a report attacking organic agriculture, written by Dennis Avery's son, Alex Avery along with Graydon Forrer from a company called Life Sciences Strategies and John Carlisle from the National Centre for Public Policy Research. According to the report, *Marketing and the Organic Food Industry*, the company Life Sciences Strategies 'specialises in public policy and communication programmes for bio-science, pharmaceutical, medical and related health industries'. The authors thanked and acknowledged the reviewers at the Institute for Economic Affairs in London.<sup>19</sup>

These contrarian groups and individuals do not just club together to propagate the anti-environmental/anti-organic message on the internet. Often they go further, deliberately reiterating each other's work in order to generate a critical mass of contrarian thought, which is picked up by a media anxious to find opposing viewpoints on previously uncontentious issues. The strategy has worked before; contrarians used it most obviously to dismiss climate change, when views from a small group of scientists funded by the fossil-fuel lobby were repeated so frequently that they were given far more prominence than their unsupported, self-interested theories actually deserved.<sup>20</sup> In attacking the organic movement, the contrarians are using the same tactics, backing their arguments up by quoting the same small group of corporate-funded scientists.

One of the central characters spreading the anti-organic backlash in Europe has been Roger Bate from the Institute of Economic Affairs, one of Britain's leading think-tanks, who helped set up the European Science and Environment Forum (ESEF) in 1994. ESEF was formed, in its own words, as an 'independent non-profit-making alliance of scientists whose aim is to ensure that the environmental debate is

properly aired... To maintain its independence and impartiality ESEF does not accept outside funding from whatever source.'<sup>21</sup> The truth is somewhat different.

The driving force behind ESEF was actually the tobacco corporation Philip Morris, along with leading anti-environmental PR firm Burson Marsteller, and another PR company, APCO Associates, which had been looking to form an associate to TASSC in Europe. Originally tentatively named Scientists for Sound Public Policy, the organisation was later renamed ESEF. Burson Marsteller believed that makers of 'consumer products (food, beverages, tobacco), packaging industry, agri-chemical industry, chemical industry, pharmaceutical industry, biotech industry, electric power industry, and telecommunications' could be persuaded to back ESEF.<sup>22</sup>

But all is not going to plan, and towards the end of last year, ESEF's web site suddenly disappeared off the internet. So Bate is now primarily leading the charge through the IEA, using the same strategy he did to attack climate change – repeatedly quoting the few known 'sceptics'. This time, the IEA is using Dennis Avery's arguments, which have been shown time and time to be based on flawed data and analysis.<sup>23</sup>

### BARMY BOOKS

In August 1999, a book called *Fearing Food; Risk, Health and the Environment* was published, edited by Bate and a colleague from the IEA, Julian Morris. 'The book shows that intensive agriculture is good for health and the environment, and is essential if the world's population is to be fed without converting vast areas of biodiverse ecosystems into cropland, which would be necessary if organic agriculture, with its lower yields, were used,' said the press release.<sup>24</sup>

One of the chapters, *The Fallacy of the Organic Utopia*, was by Dennis Avery.<sup>25</sup> Another was co-written by John Hillman from the Scottish Crop Research Institute. Hillman is on the board of the Bioindustry Association of the UK, whose mission is to encourage and promote biotechnology.<sup>26</sup> Although his chapter was mainly concerned with promoting GM, Hillman has also espoused anti-organic views, which were re-iterated in the Institute's last Annual Report.

'Organic farming raises risks of faecal contamination not only of food stuffs but also of waterways; food poisoning, high levels of natural toxins (eg aflatoxins) and allergens,' wrote Hillman. 'Contamination by copper and sulphur-containing fungicides and production of blemished, diseased and irregular produce of low consumer and food processing acceptability, low productivity and creation of reservoirs of pests and diseases, including sources of weed propagules.'<sup>27</sup> When asked for the references to back up his comments by BBC Radio 4's *Food Programme*, Hillman was said to be 'too busy' to provide the data.<sup>28</sup> Incidentally,

Hillman also believes it is 'breathtakingly naïve' to try and stabilise climate change.<sup>29</sup>

Once again the press – this time in the UK – picked up on remarks made by Avery, and also from Bate and Morris. Anti-organic articles ran in *The Evening Standard*, *The Scotsman*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Daily Mail*, amongst others. Similar attacks even appeared in reputable science journals. For example, Anthony Trewavas from the Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology at the University of Edinburgh, attacked organic agriculture in the scientific journal, *Nature*. 'As a plant biologist myself, I have little time for big, insensitive agribusiness,' Trewavas wrote in *Nature*, before launching into a broadside against the organic and environmental movements.<sup>30</sup> ❖

**'Are they trying to force us into an organic-farming straitjacket, so that they can then say that the world has too many people, we must have forced abortions...?' Dennis Avery on organic campaigners**

✦ 'Going organic worldwide, as Greenpeace wants, would destroy even more wilderness, much of it of marginal agricultural quality,' writes Trewavas, quoting Dennis Avery. 'The organic philosophy is negative and restrictive in its rules and regulations. It started as a movement simply to eliminate pesticides from food, and it is indeed beneficial to use pesticides sparingly, as organic farmers do. But the philosophy was founded on a fallacy.'

#### WEB CONTRARIANS

Trewavas, whose anti-organic articles also appear on Monsanto's web-site, is not alone at the Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology in questioning all those who stand in the way of the biotech revolution. One of Trewavas' colleagues is Noreen Murray, who chaired the Royal Society's Working Group into Arpad Pusztai, the controversial scientist from the Rowett Institute, whose experiments into GM potatoes led to questioning of the safety of GM food. In an unprecedented move, the Royal Society publicly rubbished Pusztai's work calling it 'flawed',<sup>31</sup> even though they knew they only had an 'incomplete' set of data.<sup>32</sup>

Trewavas also appeared on a BBC *Counterblast* programme attacking organic agriculture which aired in January 2000. Other contributors included Professor Phillip Stott, from the Department of Geography at the School of Oriental and African Studies. He also runs the 'Pro-Biotech', web-site at [www.ecotrop.org](http://www.ecotrop.org), and takes issue with organic agriculture, tropical deforestation and climate change. Another interviewee was contrarian journalist Richard D North, an unashamed apologist for industry.

You can also read Trewavas and Alex Avery's anti-organic views on another pro-biotech web discussion site, run by Dr. Prakash, the Director of the Center for Plant Biotechnology Research at Tuskegee University in the USA, at [www.agbioview.listbot.com](http://www.agbioview.listbot.com).

#### SAVING SCIENCE

Understanding Trewavas' and Krebs' attack on organic agriculture is key to the understanding of why apparently independent scientists have taken issue with this form of agriculture. Many of its opponents see the organic movement as standing 'against science', and specifically high tech science, a significant proportion of which is now funded by agrochemical or biotech companies. 'There is a mindset that is wedded to this high tech approach and 'scientism', that science is the answer to everything', says Dr. Ben Mephram, from the Food Ethics Council. For the FSA, this *modus operandi* is not to be challenged, but to be embraced.

'What I am suspicious of is that the FSA's starting point begins with the recognition that a huge amount of research in agriculture and food is now commercially driven. We have swapped public science for private/commercial science,' concludes Alan Simpson, MP. 'The pursuit of knowledge for public or environmental safety has already been ditched in favour of a culture which says we will pursue knowledge for the purpose of commercial gain, and anything that steps in the path will either be excluded or suppressed.' ♦

*Andy Rowell is a freelance journalist and author of **Green Backlash: Global Subversion of the Environmental Movement** (Routledge, 1996).*

## CHEMICAL REACTION: WHY NON-ORGANIC FARMING CAN BE A THREAT

By Vyvyan Howard

Normally the chemicals that we are naturally composed of (biochemicals based on carbon) can be assembled and broken down quite quickly using equally naturally occurring chemicals called enzymes. When man-made unnatural chemicals persist and accumulate in our bodies, it tells us that we do not have the necessary enzyme systems to 'detoxify' and excrete them. If they also happen to be poisonous, then they can exert their toxic action for much longer if they can't be expelled from the body.

For the past 50 or so years, the human race, and for that matter most of the wildlife on the planet, has been the subject of a rather unfortunate experiment. There has been a global production of enormous amounts of synthetic organic chemicals. In the 1940s, their annual global production was 0.5 million tons but by 1990 this had risen 500-fold to 240 million tons per year. Many of these chemicals are persistent and fat soluble and they tend, therefore, to accumulate in animal tissue. They are known as persistent organic pollutants, abbreviated to POPs. The higher up the food chain that one lives, the more collects in the body. Therefore, because they tend to enter the body faster than they can be eliminated, their concentrations increase with age. The most widely studied have been the dioxins and PCBs, but there is a cocktail of such POPs in the body, estimated to consist of up to 500 chemicals that could not have been there 100 years ago, because nobody was making them.

Many of these chemicals are organo-chlorine pesticides such as DDT and Lindane, which are still common in the food chain, even though their use has been discontinued for many years in some countries. Other chemicals include dioxins, which are unwanted by-products of either organo-chlorine chemical production or of subsequent combustion of the products, which releases dioxins into the environment. Most of these environmental pollutants

come to us in food of animal origin – meat, fish and dairy products. Dairy products are a particular problem, because of the amount we eat. However, organic meat and dairy products come from animals whose feed is carefully controlled and the animals are fed with their natural diet.

With industrially raised stock, food supplements of animal origin are added to the diet. This means that herbivores move one step up the food chain and therefore will tend to have higher levels of bioaccumulative pollutants. These are increased again, by chemicals used throughout the production of these animals – in growing their feed and as growth enhancers on the animals themselves, for example.

The other class of toxic food contaminants are the short-lived transient substances that also come to us primarily in our food and water supply. Many of these are again pesticides such as compounds of organophosphorous, pyrethroids or carbamate. In addition, there are many chemicals that are part of the throwaway society, for example softeners for plastics such as phthalate esters and foaming agents such as nonylphenol. These all have in common the fact that the body can metabolise and excrete them relatively rapidly, usually within 72 hours of ingestion. However, they are replaced on a daily basis and in some foods, levels of these chemicals can occasionally exceed recommended doses. Many of these pesticides are very toxic.

While the full toxicological effects of the mixture of chemicals that we all possess in our bodies remain incompletely understood, there is little that is available to us, other than precaution. We are now aware that these pollutants, which have been described as 'unprescribed daily environmental drugs' are having measurable effects on the fetus. One of the most positive routes of action available to us in reducing our exposure to toxic substances is to eat organic food.

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# THE LAST FRONTIER

**A global agreement currently being negotiated will allow corporations to take over the world's public services – whether people want it or not. If implemented, it will spell the end of the public sector.**

**Maude Barlow explains why it must be stopped.**

If you were Bolivian, you'd know why the world should be worried about GATS. Take a trip back in time to spring 2000, to the city of Cochabamba in the South American nation. Under pressure from the World Bank, the Bolivian government had just sold off the city's public water system to a US water corporation. This was all part of the World Bank's programme to 'streamline' the Bolivian economy – in other words, to open it up to Western-based corporations. It was, the Bolivians were assured, all in the name of economic efficiency.

The people of Cochabamba soon found out what that efficiency amounted to. Just weeks after the corporate flag had been raised over what had been a public utility, water rates were hiked up massively. Many of the peasant families of Cochabamba were required to pay up to a third of their wages for their water – more than they spent on food. The charges were crippling, and there was no alternative – even collecting rainwater to drink was made illegal.

Complaints had no effect on the water company, whose aim was now profit rather than public provision of a basic need. So Cochabambans took to the streets. In April, hundreds, then thousands, joined in demonstrations against the privatisation of this most basic resource. Four days of strikes brought the city to a standstill.

The government gave in and promised to lower water rates. Then they changed their mind. The protests began again, and got bigger. Tear gas was used, and martial law was declared. Cochabamba descended into chaos. Still the government, and the company, refused to give way. Protest leaders were rounded up at night. Dissenting media outlets were shut down. The profits of a foreign corporation took priority over the everyday needs of the Bolivian people.

But those people did not give up. The protests grew still further. Eventually, after the military shot a 17-year-old boy in the face for protesting, even the government realised the game was up. Two days later, they signed an accord agreeing to return the city's water supplies to public control.

But it was a victory that may not last. And next time, however big the protests, the people will be wasting their time.

## COMING YOUR WAY

Just a few months earlier, in the north American city of Seattle, the November 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was shut down – also by mass protests. It was, it seemed, an event that had stopped the forces of corporate globalisation in their tracks – at least for the time being.

But not so fast. Just months after the smoke and pepper spray had lifted and the protesters, government officials and reporters had gone

home, a whole new round of international talks was quietly launched in Geneva. They took place under the auspices of a little-known agreement called the General Agreement on Trade in Services – or GATS.

You probably haven't heard of GATS – few people have. That's the idea. But you should know what it will mean for you. For those negotiations are still, quietly, going on. Their purpose is, simply and starkly, to prise open the whole world's public services to corporate takeover; to make the very concept of public services not only unlikely, but probably illegal.

**'GATS could, quite simply, be globalisation's last frontier: the end of the very concept of not-for-profit public services.'**

That's what GATS is about. If it had been in force last April, it would, quite simply, have been illegal for the Bolivian government to renationalise the Cochabamba water company. Good news for corporate profits. Bad news for people.

GATS is paving the way for the privatisation of public services across the world.

Nothing will be exempt – education, healthcare, social services, postal services, museums and libraries, public transport; all will be opened up to corporate interests. Every and any service currently provided by governments in the name of the public good will be opened up to private corporations, and run for profit. GATS could, quite simply, be globalisation's last frontier: the end of the very concept of not-for-profit public services.

GATS will come into force in over 130 countries, quietly, and with little fuss, in less than two years. If nothing is done.

## WHAT IS GATS?

The General Agreement on Trade in Services is one of more than twenty trade agreements administered and enforced by the World Trade Organisation. The GATS was established in 1994, at the conclusion of the 'Uruguay Round' of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which led to the WTO's creation. GATS was one of the trade agreements adopted for inclusion when the WTO was formed in 1995. Negotiations were to begin five years later with the aim of 'progressively raising the level of [trade] liberalisation'. These talks got underway as scheduled in February 2000. The plan is to reach a final agreement by December 2002 – less than two years away.

The mandate of GATS is the 'liberalisation of trade in services'. In plain English, this means the dismantling of government barriers to the privatisation of public services. Its aim is to make it impossible for governments to run public services on a not-for-profit basis, without the participation of private companies. GATS will allow the WTO to restrict government actions relating to public services through a set of legally binding constraints. Any government disobeying the rulings of the WTO will face sanctions.

So what will happen if GATS is implemented? Charlene Barshefsky, the US Trade Representative, can tell you. Before the GATS negotiations started early last year, she asked the powerful US lobby group, the Coalition of Service Industries, what it would want included in the GATS agreement. The European Commission did the same with its industry coalition, the European Services Forum. Between them, the corporations identified the following priority areas for trade liberalisation: health care; hospital care; home care; dental care; child care; elder care; education – primary, secondary and post-secondary; museums; libraries; law; social assistance; architecture; energy; water services; environmental protection services; real estate; insurance; tourism; postal services; transport; publishing; broadcasting and many others.

The implications of this are chilling. It means that the 137 member countries of the WTO are about to agree to open up all their public services, lock stock and barrel, to free trade laws – the same laws which have allowed the WTO to strike down health, food safety and environmental laws in dozens of countries. The corporate wolves are being allowed into the last remaining fold. And once they get in, it will be too late to ever get them out.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF GLOBALISATION

How could this happen? How could governments be allowing this removal of the most basic of rights without even asking – or informing – their people? To understand the answer, it is necessary to go back to the origins of the world trade system. In 1947, a new trade body –

**‘Corporate lobby groups have identified the following priority areas for trade liberalisation under GATS: health care; hospital care; home care; dental care; child care; elder care; education – primary, secondary and post-secondary; museums; libraries; law; social assistance; architecture; energy; water services; environmental protection services; real estate; insurance; tourism; postal services; transport; publishing; broadcasting and many others.’**

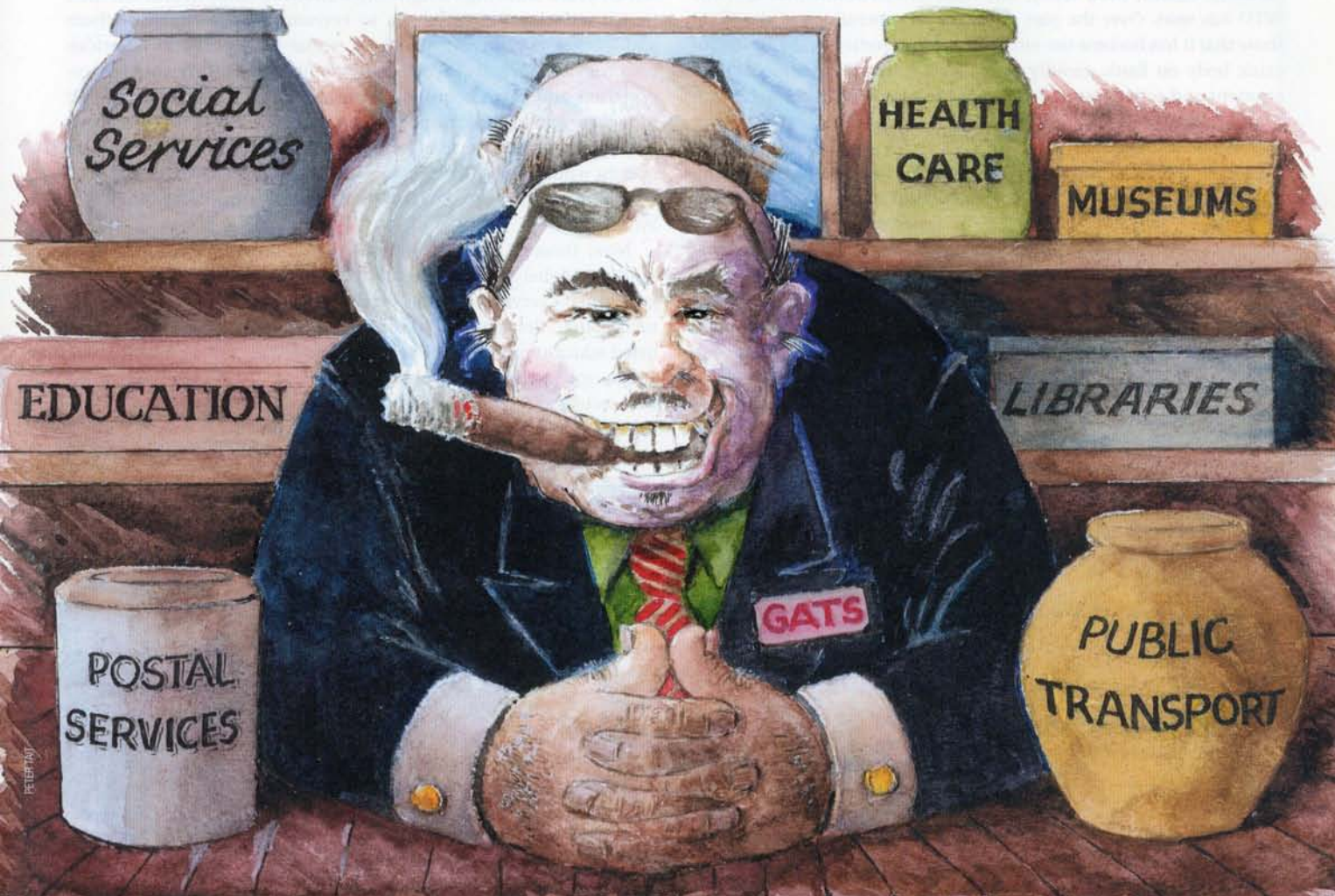
the International Trade Organisation – was created, with a very different mandate to today’s WTO. The ITO was to promote orderly global trade under the jurisdiction of the UN. The pursuit of trade was to explicitly take into account important social considerations, including full employment and the human and social rights guaranteed by the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The new ITO even had the right to regulate transnational capital to ensure it served these social ends.

But the ITO was stillborn – killed by the US, which was intent on building a very different global trade and investment regime based on fewer, not more, regulations; a regime which would benefit itself, its big corporations and its international

interests. So the US created the GATT and removed it from the jurisdiction of the UN.

Since the formation of the GATT in 1947, there have been eight ‘rounds’ of trade negotiations, each focused on progressively spreading the bounds of global trade. The first six rounds concentrated exclusively on reducing tariffs (border taxes), and the growing power of the GATT went largely unnoticed by civil society.

But the seventh ‘Tokyo Round’ (1973-1979) coincided with the emergence of the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ – a global economic model based on the principles of privatisation, free trade and deregulation – and the rise of giant transnational corporations who, because they were now global operations, had escaped nation state regulations and wanted international deregulation as well. These included giant service corporations eager to get their hands on



government monopolies, particularly in the social services sectors.

For the first time, the GATT began to deal in 'non-tariff barriers' – the rules, policies and practices of governments, such as environmental laws and publicly-funded social services, that can impact on trade. The Uruguay Round of negotiations (1986-1994) expanded the scope of subjects dramatically, naming services for the first time, and covering many areas not normally associated with trade.

#### WAKEY WAKEY WORLD

Suddenly, it became clear to many NGOs, social justice advocates and environmentalists that, while they had been busy lobbying their governments and the UN, much of the power they previously held had shifted quietly into a new arena – unelected, and largely unseen, global trade regimes.

The architects of the final agenda for the Uruguay Round wanted to put in place a body of rules governing the global economy – rules that would benefit them, and which would be backed up by the powers and tools of a global government. It was the Uruguay Round which led to the creation of the WTO – the global policeman for the trading agenda of rich corporations. Unlike the GATT, which was effectively a business contract between nations, the WTO was given 'legal personality'. It has international status equivalent to the United Nations, but with the addition of having enormous enforcement powers.

Unlike any other global institution, the WTO has the legislative and judicial power to challenge the laws, practices and policies of individual countries and strike them down if they are seen to be too 'trade restrictive'. The WTO contains no minimum standards to protect labour, human rights, social or environmental standards; every single time (but one) that the WTO has been used to challenge a domestic health, food safety, fair trade or environmental law, the WTO has won. Over the past six years, the operations of the WTO show that it has become the most powerful, secretive, and anti-democratic body on Earth, rapidly assuming the mantle of a global government and actively seeking to broaden its powers and reach.

#### CARVING UP THE SERVICES

Public services are next in line for the WTO's corporate battering ram. Global corporations have been so successful in persuading governments

everywhere that their agendas are the same – that the pursuit of corporate profit and the good of society are one and the same – that their access to many areas of public life has already been improved. Now they want to go the whole hog.

Services

is the fastest-growing sector in international trade, and offers rich pickings for canny corporations. And of all public services, health, education and water are shaping up to be the most potentially lucrative. Global expenditures on water services now exceed \$1 trillion every year; on education, they exceed \$2 trillion; and on health care, they exceed \$3.5 trillion.

In many parts of the world, what GATS will accelerate has already, tentatively, begun.

The USA might suggest a model for the dismantling of public services which GATS will unleash all over the world. In America,

health care has already become a huge business, with giant health-care corporations registered on the New York Stock Exchange. Rick Scott, the president of Columbia, the world's largest for-profit hospital corporation, is clear that health care is a business, no different to the airline or ballbearing industry. He has publicly vowed to destroy every public hospital in North America – doctors, he says, are not 'good corporate citizens'.

Meanwhile, investment houses like Merrill Lynch are already predicting that public education will be globally privatised over the next decade the way public health has been. They say there is an untold amount of profit to be made when this happens. The European Union recently announced that every publicly-run school in Europe must be twinned with a corporation by the end of the decade. The conquest of foreign markets has now become a key common strategy among higher education institutions around the world.

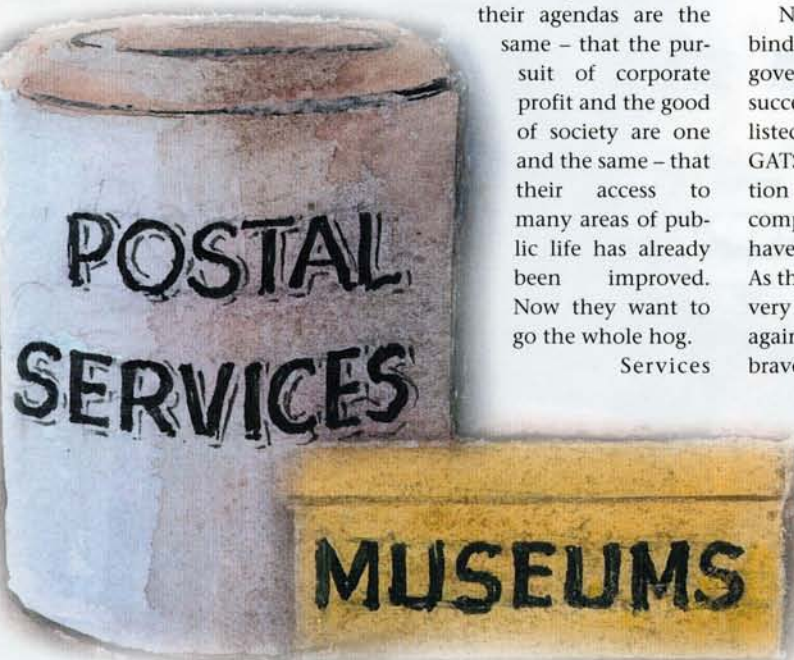
Many parts of the 'Third World' have been forced to dismantle their public infrastructures in recent decades under International Monetary Fund-imposed structural adjustment programmes. In order to be eligible for debt relief, for example, dozens of 'developing' countries have been forced to abandon public social programmes over the last 20 years, allowing foreign corporations to come in and sell their health and education 'products' to 'consumers' who can afford them and leaving millions without basic social services. Latin American countries are currently experiencing an invasion of US healthcare corporations and Asian countries allow branch plants of foreign-based university and health care chains. Recently, the World Bank has been forcing the same countries to privatise their water services and are openly working with corporate water giants like Vivendi and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, to establish their 'rights' to profiteer in the Third World.

Now, through the GATS negotiations, these corporations want binding, global and irreversible rules guaranteeing them access to government service contracts everywhere in the world. And they are succeeding. Already, over 40 countries, including all of Europe, have listed education within the realm of the GATS, opening up their public education sectors to foreign based corporate competition. Almost 100 countries have done the same with healthcare. As the new talks progress, it will be very hard for any country to swim against the tide – even if any are brave enough to try.

#### WHAT'S IN THE GATS?

The existing GATS agreement – which is by no means finalised, and could get even worse – covers all service sectors and most government measures,

**'Investment houses like Merrill Lynch predict that public education will be globally privatised over the next decade, and say there is an untold amount of profit to be made when this happens.'**



including laws, practices, regulations and guidelines, written and unwritten. No government measure that affects trade in services, whatever its aim, even for environmental or consumer protection, universal coverage or to enforce labour standards, is beyond the reach of GATS. Nothing public is safe.

Essentially, the agreement would prohibit 'discrimination' against a foreign corporation which applies to run a public services – even if that corporation has a bad track record in environmental or social areas. It has also already been agreed that some existing WTO rules will apply 'horizontally' to public services across the board, whether or not the area has already been listed with the GATS. One such 'horizontal' rule is 'Most Favoured Nation', which says that, once the corporations from one country are operating in your market, you must allow the corporations from all countries in. This rule will apply to all services, even ones still protected in some countries, like health and education. Similarly, under the horizontal rule, all regulations in any given sector, including social services, must be 'Least Trade Restrictive' – in English, all public services – even social welfare – will have to operate market mechanisms.

Defenders of GATS insist that its opponents are being hysterical. There is nothing to worry about, they say. They point to the 'exemption' within GATS for some public services provided by governments. Some countries, they will point out, have already claimed exemptions for their publicly-funded social security programmes. But it's not as simple as that. Under GATS article 1.3C, for a service to be considered to be under government authority, it must be provided 'entirely free'. That means that the service in question must be completely financed by government and have no commercial purpose. Since hardly any service sector in the world is entirely free, this exemption is increasingly meaningless.

#### WHAT'S PROPOSED FOR THE GATS?

In his new book, *GATS, How the WTO's New 'Service' Negotiations Threaten Democracy*, Canadian researcher Scott Sinclair identifies the three priorities of the current round of negotiations. First, GATS officials will attempt to expand corporate access to domestic markets. Governments will be under great pressure to list more of their services and exempt fewer. The most potent weapon will be the push to have 'National Treatment' applied horizontally. National Treatment is a fundamental tenet of free trade; it forbids governments from favouring their domestic sectors over foreign-based companies. Already, National Treatment applies to certain services in the GATS; the goal is to apply it across the board.

On top of this, the powerful Western countries will be pressing for more binding Market Access provisions, pressing 'developing' countries for guaranteed, irreversible access to their markets, and diminishing democratic government authority.

Secondly, GATS officials are seeking to place severe restraints on domestic regulations, thereby limiting governments' ability to enact environmental, health and other standards that hinder free trade. Article VI:4 calls for the development of any 'necessary disciplines' to ensure that 'measures relating to qualification requirements and procedures, technical standards and licensing requirements do not constitute unnecessary barriers to trade'. Translation: don't let your pesky national standards get in the way of foreign corporate interests. This provision would also apply horizontally. Governments would be compelled to demonstrate that regulations, standards and laws were 'necessary' to achieve a WTO-sanctioned objective, and that no less commercially-restrictive alternative was available.

Third, the new talks are aimed at developing new GATS rules and restrictions, intended to further restrict the use of government subsi-

dies, such as those used in public works, municipal services and social programmes. A particularly threatening development is the demand for an expansion of the bland-sounding 'Commercial Presence' rules.

Commercial Presence allows an 'investor' in one GATS country to establish a presence in any other GATS country and compete not only for business against domestic suppliers but for public funds against domestic publicly funded institutions and services.

Together, these proposals will hugely expand the authority of the WTO in the day-to-day business of governments. They will make the exercising of democratic control over the future of basic public services a virtual impossibility.

#### HOW GATS WILL AFFECT YOU

Every single aspect of public life will be affected by GATS. Already, as a result of economic globalisation, every country in the world is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Wealth is gushing to the top as a growing economic chasm separates those who are benefiting from the system from an ever-expanding underclass. To ensure what American education writer Jonathan Kozol calls 'survival of the fittest,' a tiered system of education and social security is becoming the norm all over the world as we collectively abandon an earlier dream of universal rights. We are creating top schools and healthcare systems for the elite of the world and a tiered system – or no system at all – for those who don't count.

The GATS serves this corporate, profit-driven vision of society. It's important to understand, in no-nonsense terms, what is at stake.

Under the proposed GATS regime, foreign health and education corporations will have the right to establish themselves in any WTO country. They will have the right to compete for public money with public institutions like hospitals and schools. Standards for health and education professionals will be subject to WTO rules to ensure they are not an 'impediment to trade'. Degree-granting authority will be given to foreign-based education corporations. Foreign-based telemedicine services will become legal. And countries won't be able to stop the trans-border competition of low-cost health and education professionals.

Already, the WTO Services Division has hired a private company called the Global Alliance for Transnational Education to document worldwide policies that 'discriminate against foreign education providers'. The results of this 'study' will be used to pressure those countries that still retain a public education sector to relinquish it to the global market.

Disturbingly, GATS also includes authority over 'environmental services' and natural resource protection. Our parks, wildlife, river systems, and forests could all become contested areas as global transnational 'environmental service' corporations demand the competitive model

**'The GATS serves this corporate, profit-driven vision of society. It's important to understand, in no-nonsense terms, what is at stake.'**



for their 'management'. Profit-hungry child care chains would invade every country, as would prison chains like Wackenhut, with its reputation for violence and abuse against both prisoners and staff. Virtually unlimited access to foreign suppliers would have to be given to municipal contracts in construction, sewage, garbage disposal, sanitation, tourism and water services.

Simply put, the 'commons' – or what's left of it – will come under full assault if GATS is enacted. What used to be areas of common heritage, like seeds and genes, air and water, culture and heritage, health care and education, will be slated to be commodified, privatised and sold to the highest bidder on the open market. Countries like Canada and France, which have (and cherish) national, universal health care and education systems will lose them. Countries like Britain and Chile, which once had universal social programmes, or the US, which has never had public health care, will have a public model closed to them in the future, as would countries like India and South Africa, struggling now to ensure such rights to their people.

The ultimate end of this exercise is perhaps best summed up by one top US WTO official, who said bluntly of the GATS/WTO process: 'Basically, it won't stop until foreigners finally start to think like Americans, act like Americans and – most of all – shop like Americans.'

**'Basically, it won't stop until foreigners finally start to think like Americans, act like Americans and – most of all – shop like Americans.'**



#### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

If GATS is to be defeated, there really is no time to lose. The world needs to wake up – and fast – to what is being done behind its back. We urgently need an international movement of the kind that came together to fight the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and went on to shut down the streets of Seattle. (For a list of groups and individuals already fighting GATS, see below.)

We need research on every aspect of the GATS in every country, and we need to share it. We need to form common fronts in every country which would include all the major sectors involved – educators, health care workers and advocates, public sector unions, environmentalists, farmers, writers and artists, indigenous peoples, and others. We need solidarity, co-operation and speed.

We need 'GATS-Free Zones' on universities and high school campuses, churches and local community centres. We need to go to our

local governments and pass local resolutions against GATS. We need to write letters to our governments and local newspapers and alternative media publications.

Simply put, we must make the GATS a household word; and not a nice one.

Opponents of GATS and the mindset behind it should have three basic demands. Firstly, we must call for a full moratorium on the GATS negotiations and on the draconian provisions of the current agreement, such as the assault on domestic regulation. It is entirely unacceptable that our governments are meeting behind closed doors to carve up our rights for the benefit of their corporate friends. This must stop immediately, while we take stock of the situation and take this issue to the public. Essentially, we should demand that 'the commons' be removed from free trade agreements altogether.

Secondly, we need ironclad guarantees from our governments that no future GATS negotiations would prevent governments from providing good public services to their citizens. Furthermore, we need a GATS that would seek to strengthen these domestic programmes through international law, and encourage their development around the world.

Finally, we must move towards true public engagement in the rules governing international trade. While we know that our governments are not going to listen to us because we have good arguments, but because we have political muscle, we must seek to create a global democracy in which governments would serve their citizens and honour their commitments on human rights and ecological stewardship. We must not sit silently by and allow these rights to be traded away.

The world's people said no to the MAI. Increasing numbers said no to the Millennium Round of the WTO. We must now say no to the GATS. And we must be heard. There really is no alternative. ♦

*Maude Barlow is head of the Council of Canadians and a campaigner for citizens' rights. She is the author of several books, including MAI: The Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the Threat to Canadian Sovereignty, with Tony Clarke. Her autobiography, The Fight of My Life: Confessions of an Unrepentant Canadian, was published in 1998.*

#### GO GET GATS

The following organisations are actively campaigning against GATS. Contact the one nearest you to find out how you can get involved.

##### The Council of Canadians

502-151 Slater Street  
Ottawa ON K2P 5H3  
Canada  
**contact:**  
Morag Carter (613) 233-4487 ext. 252

##### World Development Movement

25 Beehive Place  
London SW9 7QR UK  
Tel: (020)7 737 6215 Fax: (020) 7 274 8232  
www.wdm.org.uk  
email: wdm@wdm.org.uk

##### Observatoire de la Mondialisation

14 Grande Rue  
Sauve 30610  
France  
**contact:**  
Agnes Bertrand 33 466 7707 04

##### Public Citizen

215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE  
Washington DC 20003  
USA  
**contact:**  
Margrete Strand Rangnes (202) 546-4996

##### Corporate Europe Observatory

Prinsennelland 329  
1013 LP Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
**contact:**  
Olivier Hoedeman 31 30 236 4422

##### Third World Network

228 Macalister Road  
Penang  
Malaysia  
**contact:**  
Martin Khor 60 4 2266728

# DOCTOR'S HANDWRITING

*A monthly column that helps you decipher the medical truth.*

In a White Paper on Food Safety, adopted a year ago, the Brussels Commission of the EU announced that it intended to create a standardised market for vitamin and mineral supplements which seeks to put a very low ceiling on the maximum levels of dietary supplements allowed to be sold. A wide disparity exists between the stated laws of individual EU members on the dosages allowed for vitamin supplements. In France and Germany, for instance, no products containing more than one to three times the Recommended Daily Allowance may be sold without a pharmaceutical licence.

In contrast, countries like the UK and the Netherlands have always enjoyed liberal laws relating to the content of vitamins, with few restrictions. Both countries also have few trade restrictions for export across other European countries. The effect of this is that British firms are cleaning up on European business, while continental manufacturers can only stand by, watching helplessly, their hands tied by their own local laws.

It was amid such a climate of obvious trade disparity that the EU, heavily lobbied by the pharmaceutical industry, suggested a directive which would standardise laws concerning vitamin supplements all across Europe.

If passed into European law, it must be adopted by all member states. As a trade directive, there is no possibility of opting out, such as there is with other categories of directives, such as taxation. For many countries like Germany and France, this represents a liberalising of their currently stringent laws. They may have the ability to increase the nutrient levels of food supplements and, thus, have more popular products on the shelves.

But, for Britain and the Netherlands, this directive is almost certain to be more restrictive. One of the main problems centres around the use of a 'positive list' of permitted ingredients.

The list is incredibly conservative, listing only the most well-known vitamins and minerals for which RDAs have been established. At the moment a number of important nutrients – such as inositol and choline – which are known to be vital to human health but where RDAs haven't been established, have been excluded. Missing also are new supplements such as MSM and glucosamine, which have only recently been found to have therapeutical properties. Any vitamin or mineral not on the list when the directive is put in force will not be allowed to be sold anywhere in Europe.

Even more worrying are the criteria for determining permitted levels of nutrients. According to the directive, setting these maximum limits should take into account several factors. These include the upper safe level (USL) of the total intake of each nutrient from dietary sources. This is the highest intake shown to be safe before adverse events appear.

The USL of each nutrient is to be established by the Scientific Committee for Food (SCF). The Commission will then make its rec-



## JUST SAY NO TO DRUGS

BY **LYNNE  
McTAGGART**

ommendations for the supplement levels, taking into account the intake of nutrients from a 'normal' diet, plus the intake from 'fortified foods'. They've also indicated that they will subtract some amounts just to be on the safe side.

What this means in practice is that the levels will be set well below the USLs, which are likely to be absurdly low in the first place.

The SCF, a body composed of food technologists rather than nutritional doctors, has already given a worrying indication of where it stands on a number of nutrients. For instance, it has indicated that the USL on B6 should be 25 mg – far lower than the USL set by American authorities at 100-200 mg. From that 25 mg then would be subtracted a certain amount for the B6 in a normal diet, another amount to compensate for fortified foods and a final amount to provide a wider safety margin. What may finally emerge is a level of B6 as low as five mg. This would mean that British women taking B6 for premenstrual syndrome (PMS) – usually 50-100 mg per day – would have to swallow 10 to 20 vitamin pills a day just to maintain the levels they are used to.

The directive is now under consideration by the Environment Committee of the European Parliament. A resulting report will then be sent for consideration by the entire European Parliament at its plenary session in February.

If the directive is adopted, the intended timetable is that member states will pass laws so that only products complying with the directive may be sold after 1 June 2002. The net effect of the EU directive would be to clear off the shelves any vitamin supplements as a preventative or therapeutic medicine.

At the risk of sounding like a conspiracy theorist, it seems to me that we face a deliberate and concerted effort by the pharmaceutical industry all over the world to crush alternative medicine.

When all is said and done, this is about the drug companies finally wresting control of the enormously profitable vitamin market and making it a non-threatening adjunct to its own main business – peddling drugs as the only therapeutic option. The EU directives amount to a major infringement of human rights. If Brussels and the pharmaceutical industry are allowed to dictate the levels of vitamins you are allowed to buy, next it will dictate which alternative medicines you're allowed to have. You can act now by writing to your MEP to protest. Our silence will only be interpreted as a stamp of approval for the creation of an even bigger, more powerful, drugs industry.

*Lynne McTaggart is editor of **What Doctors Don't Tell You**, a monthly publication which exposes the dangers of modern medicine. WDDTY has committed itself to helping efforts to organise a world-wide protest against the EU directive to take place sometime this year, probably in the autumn. If you can contribute your time or money, please write to us at WDDTY (Satellite House, 2 Salisbury Rd, London SW19 4EZ), and we will contact you once the organisation has begun.*



## DOWN ON THE FARM

HAVE THE CRITICS OF ORGANIC FARMING REALLY CONSIDERED ALL THE IMPLICATIONS? JONATHAN DIMBLEBY EXPLAINS HIS OWN PATH OF DISCOVERY.

**A FEW YEARS** ago, few bothered about the organic movement except to mock the Prince of Wales for his pioneering contribution to what has now become a major debate about the crops we grow and the food we eat. Today, however, the organic movement is on a roller-coaster; the number of people who choose to grow or consume organic produce is rising at a dramatic rate, a phenomenon that is forcing everyone involved at every stage in the food chain to rethink the basic assumptions of the last 50 years.

Yet despite this growth, this rapid reassessment of recent agricultural developments, the organic movement has its critics and they are loud and insistent. 'Organic farming cannot feed an ever-increasing global population,' they shout; 'It cannot weather the inconsistencies of climate,' they continue; and they conclude with the ever-common mantra: 'It's just too expensive'.

The critics of the organic movement have much to say, and before I continue, I must be honest. There was once a time when I may have been among their number.

I was brought up on a small farm in Sussex. I took it all for granted. The cats, the dogs, the ponies, the cows, the pigs, the chickens and two geese ominously named Christmas Day and Boxing Day who grew very old and fierce – because, when the moment arrived, no-one had had the temerity to take the action required to turn them into a feast. On our farm, chemical fertilisers were still a novelty, referred to disparagingly as 'artificial'. Pesticides, similarly, were unknown: docks, nettles and thistles were scythed away by hand just as they came into seed. Antibiotics were a last resort, not an addiction. We did not use the term organic; indeed I had never heard of it.

I decided I wanted to be a farmer. I went to agricultural college and remember trying to create on paper a profitable farm business. I soon discovered that it was – apparently – impossible both to make money and to recreate the traditional character of my childhood acres. The figures simply didn't stack up. To succeed, I discovered, you had to specialise.

You needed vast acres of corn or an intensive dairy farm with scores if not hundreds of cows – thin and spindly creatures, invariably black and white in colour with pendulous udders, designed and constructed by geneticists to produce vast quantities of milk in the most efficient way possible.



INTENSIVE FARMING WAS  
A BRAVE NEW WORLD  
AND REMARKABLY  
SEDUCTIVE. I BOUGHT  
THE ARGUMENT HOOK,  
LINE AND SINKER

Or you could have battery chickens in their hundreds of thousands, caged and cramped to prevent them moving around freely and thus expending wasteful energy that should be more profitably deployed either laying an egg a day or getting fat as fast as possible. Or pigs, sows tethered in stalls, piglets weaned early and reared in the semi-dark on wooden slats in a humid atmosphere that reeked of dung and urine. It was a world in which farmers were required to be permanently at war – zapping the enemy that lurked in the soil, in the hedges, trees and ponds, in the very air itself, with an awesome selection of chemical firepower. Victory would be secured with pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. And, in the case of livestock, with the wonder of antibiotics used on a daily basis both to promote growth and to prevent disease.

It was a brave new world and it was remarkably seductive. Food would be plentiful and cheap and we would all live happily ever after. I bought the argument hook, line and sinker. I even wrote an article which was published in the college magazine suggesting that the vista was not only attractive but

exceedingly profitable. And I castigated the farming community for moaning all the way to the bank with their huge subsidy cheques from the British taxpayer.

Anyway, I soon found myself on another primrose path. Via university and into television where I spent a great deal of time travelling the world from one crisis or disaster to another. In India, Latin America, but especially in Africa, and there, particularly in Ethiopia, I saw the horrific consequences of what were then widely regarded as natural disasters. The rains failing; the droughts; the seed perishing on the stalk; no grain. People starving.

In Ethiopia in 1973, I stumbled across human suffering on a scale that I could scarcely believe. People dead and dying on the roadside and in makeshift camps in the towns and villages round about. I saw piles of bodies waiting to be buried; entire families; mothers and fathers, children and tiny babies. To witness such things – a young mother grieving for the dead baby she still clasped to her chest – reminded me of the concentration camp at Belsen, the full horror of which was revealed to the world in 1945 by my father. No-one thought that Belsen was a natural disaster: everyone knew that it was the calculated consequence of an evil vision.

It seemed to me that this first famine in Ethiopia, or rather the first to attract a huge international response – whilst very different from the crime against humanity perpetrated at Belsen – was not possible to explain away, glibly and forgivingly, as a natural disaster.

It is true that the rains had failed. But the soil was also eroding fast. Trees and forests had been cut down to provide fuel and even the most fertile soils were eroding at an alarming rate. Water storage and irrigation systems were notable by their absence. And it was also noticeable that only the poor succumbed while the rich – the landowners, the merchants, the officials, the ministers and the generals – continued to prosper.

So I met people who knew better, and I read, and I learnt a little. And as a result I came to the view that almost no disaster was natural – and that the environmental devastation was both cause and effect: the product of a complex set of interwoven causes – among the most obvious of which were poverty, injustice, corruption, repression and war. A vicious circle and a vortex for hundreds of millions of innocent people.

To put it another way: we must treat the planet as if we are going to live for ever and not as though we had simply dropped in for a weekend break. I think that is a pretty good rule of thumb, litmus test and guide to action. The phrase used today to describe this approach is 'sustainable development'.

What I've seen in the poorest parts of the poorest countries of the Third World over the last 25 years offers a crucial challenge to the notion of sustainable development. You cannot have sustainable development anywhere on earth when the great majority of the global population is getting poorer while the rest of us get richer. That is a recipe for disaster, not development. If it is to mean anything at all, sustainable development must be about fairness in the use of the resources on which we all depend for survival.

And that, for me, is where sustainable development meets the organic movement. Essential to the idea of organic production is the belief that it is possible to work with nature, not against nature. That you can produce high quality and nutritious food without zapping every predator in sight. That good timing and sensible crop rotation, combined with a respect for biodiversity, is the most sustainable form of agriculture possible: protecting the environment, enhancing human health, and – incidentally – strengthening, not weakening, the social and economic fabric of rural communities.

Organic production is based on the principle that, in the chain of life on earth, no species is irrelevant and all are interdependent: from bacteria to fungi, from insects to vertebrates. Adherence to organic principles requires respect for these intricate relationships that between them sustain the biosphere – and thereby human existence.

A measure of that intricacy is the fact that if you scoop up one cubic metre of earth from an ancient beech forest, you will find no fewer than 50,000 small earthworms, 50,000 insects and mites, and 12 million roundworms. From one gramme of that soil you might unearth some 30,000 protozoa, 50,000 algae, 400,000 fungi and billions of individual bacteria of unknown species.

The American poet, farmer and philosopher, Wendell Berry, writes of this organic life in the soil in lyrical, almost spiritual, terms:

'The soil is the healer and restorer and resurrector by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life.

'It is alive itself. It is a grave, too, of course. Or a healthy soil is. It is full of dead animals and plants, bodies that have passed through other bodies... the only way into the soil is through other bodies. But no matter how finely the dead are broken down, or how many times they are eaten, they yet give into other life. If a healthy soil is full of death it is also full of life... Given only the health of the soil nothing that dies is dead for very long.'

The Prince of Wales is fond of saying that seeing is believing. And when you see organic crops in the field, you know what he means. I have seen a field of beans, black and sticky with aphids. You think that the crop must be doomed. And then three months later the aphids have entirely disappeared. And the crop looks wonderful.

What has happened? No, not a drop of pesticide. No dust from any fungicide. The work has been done by ladybirds. Ladybirds which have come into life in the surrounding hedgerows, protected in a chemical-free environment and, as nature dictates, moved in *en masse* to wipe out the aphids and clean up the crop. It happens year after year. Natural predation; no chemicals.

In this context, I am a touch perplexed by Sir John Krebs, the new head of the Food Standards Agency, who seems to me to have been rather less well-advised than might have been good for him. How can he be so certain as to instruct the public – as he did on a recent BBC Country File programme – that consumers are wasting their money if they think they are getting extra safety by buying organic? Why is he so dis-

missive? I am sure that he has not been nobbled. Yet he has allowed himself to rush into judgement.

A growing body of research demonstrates that the beneficial effects of organic farming in protecting biodiversity go much wider. Indeed, there is evidence to show what organic producers have long suspected: that organic farming methods are an exceptionally effective way of protecting the wildlife of rural Britain.

For my own part, I end almost where I started – with thoughts of local farming, and my own process of learning. I once thought that intensive farming was the way ahead – the more you grow, the more you feed; everyone's happy. But in those young years of mine I was viewing agriculture in an isolated context, failing to see that farms are not just providers of food, but intrinsic human relationships with the world around us all. The more I read and saw, the more the bigger picture began to reveal itself.

For me, organic agriculture is destined to play a crucial part in that big picture: helping to create a future in which those who follow us – our children and our children's children – will be able to look back and say, 'they did us proud'.

*Jonathan Dimbleby is a broadcaster and journalist.*

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ARE GOING TO LIVE  
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BREAK

# THE UNWORKABLE TRINITY: TRUTH, MARKET FORCES AND THE MEDIA

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE INADEQUACIES OF THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA, SAYS DAVID CROMWELL, ASK ITS JOURNALISTS.

**IN SURVEYS OF** British public opinion, journalists typically rank below politicians, lawyers and used-car salesmen as trustworthy characters. And yet we depend upon journalists to guide us through today's rapidly evolving, information-rich 'media age'. The internet, digital television and technologies as yet unborn all promise (or threaten) to revolutionise how we learn about what's going on in a world increasingly shaped by the forces of economic globalisation. But there is surely no substitute for good-quality, probing journalism. After all, it is the great crusading craft. The bastion of democracy. The fourth estate, and all that.

In every society, authority – whether government, corporate or pressure group – needs to be constantly and vigorously challenged by an independent press. In every society too, that challenge rarely comes from the right. Instead, in theory at least, it should come from the campaigning, liberal media. For if they don't fulfil this function, what is their purpose?

Good question. For the fact is that, in Britain, they don't. And if you don't believe me, listen to the voices of the journalists themselves; for they have an interesting tale to tell.

Consider, for example, Nato's so-called 'humanitarian intervention' in Kosovo two years ago. The PM's spokesman, Alastair Campbell, was told by *The Guardian's* Maggie O'Kane that he ought to be grateful for the partisan support he received from journalists. 'Campbell should acknowledge', said O'Kane, 'that it was the press reporting of the Bosnian war and the Kosovar refugee crisis that gave his boss the public support and sympathy he needed to fight the good fight against Milosevic.' The BBC's John Simpson also spoke up for the media's support of Nato: 'Why did British, American, German, and French public opinion stay rock-solid for the bombing, in spite of Nato's mistakes? Because they knew the war was right. Who gave them the information? The media.'

In fact, it was liberal commentators who were at the forefront of support for Nato intervention in Kosovo. *The Guardian's* Jonathan Freedland, who declined to talk to me about the media's role in that war, wrote of how 'either the West could try to halt the greatest campaign of barbarism in Europe since 1945 – or it could do nothing'. The Third Way was to inflict a barbarism of its own.

Andrew Marr, former *Observer* columnist, *Independent* editor and now BBC political editor, is another liberal defender of the Nato



TAKE ANY BROADSHEET  
PAPER ON ANY DAY OF  
THE WEEK AND  
COMPARE IT TO ANY  
OTHER BROADSHEET ON  
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moral crusade in Kosovo. In *The Observer*, Marr wrote a number of fawning articles with titles such as 'Hail to the chief. Sorry, Bill, but this time we're talking about Tony', and 'Brave, bold, visionary. Whatever became of Blair the ultra-cautious cynic?' Marr declared himself in awe of Blair's 'moral courage' and called upon Blair to take the 'Macbeth option': not to hold back from wading further in blood.

By relying on such 'compliant journalists', claims *The Independent's* Robert Fisk, Nato was able to conduct a war that actually had limited public support. Fisk expressed scorn at the almost universal acceptance by his fellow reporters of the Nato line spun to them. 'Most of the journalists at Nato headquarters were so supine, so utterly taken in by Nato's generals and air commodores that their questions might have been printed out for them by Nato in advance.'

'Supine' obedience and uniformity are distinguishing features of the modern press. Take any broadsheet paper on any day of the week and compare it to any other broadsheet on the same day. You'll find that it's amazingly similar. The 'news of the day' is the same across virtually all the newspapers. 'It's not a conspiracy', says media analyst David Edwards, 'just a reflection of the editorial need to follow state-corporate power, to avoid stepping on the toes of authority, as well as the fear of looking stupid by going out on a limb chasing

the "wrong story"'. Edwards adds: 'Each big story is approached from the same "hard-hitting" journalistic angle which is marked by asking tough questions about peripheral issues, but leaving the structure of society unexamined.'

Two reasons for this, among many others, are the mass media's concentrated ownership and its imperative to attract business advertising to survive in a fiercely competitive market. *The Guardian's* Hugo Young acknowledges the truth of this, but responds: '*The Guardian*, although free from the usual ownership pressures, exists with everyone else's commercial pressures. We struggle to strike the right balances.'

But there are other, often unrecognised, constraints at work too. Robert McChesney, a professor of communications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, points out that 'Professional journalism relies heavily on official sources. Reporters have to talk to the PM's official spokesperson, the White House press secretary, the business association, the army general. What

those people say is news. Their perspectives are automatically legitimate.' Whereas, according to McChesney, 'if you talk to prisoners, strikers, the homeless, or protesters, you have to paint their perspectives as unreliable, or else you've become an advocate and are no longer a "neutral" professional journalist'. Such reliance on official sources gives the news an inherently conservative cast and gives those in power tremendous influence over defining what is or isn't 'news'. McChesney, author of *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, warns: 'This is precisely the opposite of what a functioning democracy needs, which is a ruthless accounting of the powers that be.'

Polly Toynbee of *The Guardian* agrees: 'Yes, the media is responsible for a huge amount of evil and we have the worst in the western world,' she says. Toynbee, a former *Independent* columnist and BBC correspondent, concludes despairingly: 'The trouble is, what's to be done?'

Toynbee's resigned dejection at the parlous state of even the liberal media is, it seems, all too common, and is shared by other prominent journalists. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, one of the few columnists anywhere in the mainstream to highlight the devastating impact of economic sanctions against Iraq and identify the US and UK as the prime culprits, admits: 'So much of what you say [about media complicity in human rights abuses] is depressingly true and believe me there are days when I want to have two baths to wash away my sense of disgust that I am part of the media industry.'

Such resignation is not uncommon. Amongst the journalists who responded to my queries, there was a constant refrain: 'what can I possibly do?' Or – worse – 'it's nothing to do with me'. John Naughton of *The Observer* says: 'I don't, alas, have any influence over editorial policy.' There must be a whole army of journalists beaver away who believe that they have 'no influence over editorial policy'. In fact, as John Pilger correctly puts it: 'journalists are the essential footsoldiers in a network devoted to power and propaganda'. It's a view not shared, unsurprisingly, by *The Independent's* Michael Brown, a former Conservative MP: 'Such arguments are very similar to the self-styled "libertarian socialist" Noam Chomsky who lectures anyone prepared to listen on how the media is effectively an instrument of nasty capitalists exploiting humanity.'

Brown is typical of those in the media who cannot resist using the 'conspiracy theory' charge that rears its ugly head all too often. David Edwards counters: 'This is a standard response: to reject criticism of the mass media as the ravings of conspiracy theorists. It's not that the media is "an instrument of nasty capitalists" – in other words that it is controlled by elite interests – but that the media is part of the same elite interests. The media industry is not controlled by big business, it is big business.' A controversial view to those raised on a diet of mainstream news. But David Edwards is right.

'One of the main problems with the British media', David Seymour, political editor at *The Mirror*, told me, 'is that the level of criticism is pathetically low'. Seymour, a journalist of 30 years' standing, added: 'None of the [press] commentators provide intelligent, unbiased criticism. Some are plain absurd.' But even such apparently scathing criticism of the press actually avoids some uncomfortable truths. Namely, that elite interests shape the mass media agenda and that the media is complicit in human rights and environmental abuses that go largely unreported. Ostensibly hard-

hitting and media-savvy journalists invariably focus instead on symptoms of the underlying malaise.

Several liberal journalists said something to the effect that though the press was far from perfect, at least their own paper was the 'best of a bad bunch'. But is that good enough? Are self-avowed liberal newspapers really better than more explicitly reactionary broadsheets? In reality, ostensibly 'centre-left' newspapers mark the limits of acceptable and decent debate just as much as the right-wing press, while maintaining the illusion of a progressive fourth estate.

At the other, more honourable, end of the spectrum of journalism, lies a commitment to reporting the true state of the world, rather than the views held by authority. In response to my leading opening question: 'To what extent can we learn the truth about the world from the mainstream media?', Greg Palast of *The Observer* shot back, 'You can't... that's why I'm on the Board of www.MediaChannel.org which is attempting to bust open the media monopolies.' MediaChannel is just one of many internet resources – ZNet, SchNEWS and Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) are other major sites – that provide 'alternative' or 'radical' perspectives on world affairs. David Edwards suggests that we should replace 'radical' with the word 'rational'. Use of the former word is a standard technique, he believes, to marginalise views that run counter to the interests of power in society.

That many serious, major topics – sanctions against Iraq, vigorous business lobbying to create a corporate-shaped economy, the paltry political response to climate change – are rarely raised by any mainstream newspaper or broadcaster is damning. Wouldn't a truly 'free' and healthy media, for example, examine itself rigorously – its own assumptions, prejudices and omissions? No doubt many editors and journalists are aware of this but are too afraid of bucking the system. After all, who wants to have one's career blocked or lose one's job when there's a mortgage to pay? And so, media debate is restricted within tightly constrained parameters that serve capital, but not democracy.

*The Independent's* David Aaronovitch, who refrained from participating in my polling of journalists despite several invitations to do so, wrote recently that 'in the age of the media, what we have is the most complex possible relationship

between politics, public, perception and power'. But Aaronovitch and most of his cohorts barely scratch the surface of this relationship. As Nick Cohen revealed last year in the *New Statesman*, many liberal commentators earn a nice salary, thank you very much indeed, by portraying themselves as the watchdogs of democracy while – in reality – they are merely snapping playfully at the heels of authority.

And so, the poor majority of the world continue to be trampled upon by Western governments, corporations and investors; environmental and human rights abuses mount up; and 'democracy' is moulded to the specifications of centralised power, even as a rising frenzy of trivia maintains its grip on the airwaves and newspapers.

Welcome to the media age.

*David Cromwell is a freelance writer. His first book, Private Planet, will be published later this year.*

WOULDN'T A TRULY  
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# RIGHT THE WRONG

CRITICS OF GLOBALISATION, SAYS JEREMY SEABROOK, SHOULD FOCUS ON REBUTTING IT, NOT FINDING ALTERNATIVE THEORIES.

**THE ULTIMATE RESPONSE** of the apologists for globalisation to their critics is: 'You always say what you are against, but what are you for; what would you put in its place?' This defiant question is not really an attempt to elicit a response. It is a triumphal conclusion, designed to demonstrate the futility of alternatives. It hangs in the air, mocking, rhetorical, and unanswerable.

This final flourish has the effect of confounding critics, making them fall silent; or, in some cases, increasing the rage with which they attack the bearers of globalisation. Like so many contemptuous dismissals of criticism of 'the inevitable', the pseudo-question, 'What would you put in its place?' is itself a defensive reaction. Usually, however, the anti-globalisers stumble, hesitate. The argument appears lost.

The rejoinder they should take up, in fact, is, 'What do you, the eager globalisers, the apostles of integration, the beneficiaries of ever greater concentrations of wealth and power, intend to put in the place of the disturbed life-ways and destroyed cultures, the ruined resources and damaged relationships with which you have strewn the world?' And the answer to that is everywhere apparent.

For these are the destroyers of all existing human arrangements, the busy replacers of all alternative ways of answering human need. These are, literally, the movers and shakers of a world, the initiators of the upheavals, the tearing up of humanity by the roots, the pluckers-out of ancient and sustainable societies and the substituters of market-relationships for all others. It is to them that the challenge they hurl at their critics should be thrown.

So it is with all their prophetic visionary fervours for change. Just as they have detached people from symbiotic relationships with the Earth, they have torn meaning from language; so that while they talk of environment, prudence, poverty-abatement, future generations and, above all, 'sustainability', they also advocate compulsory driven change, the vast migrations, evictions and disturbances which turn all of us into economic migrants, compelled to seek livelihood in the great monocultural plantations which produce nothing but money.

All human life is characterised by a mixture of continuity and change. But it is time to ask more searching questions about what, precisely, is being conserved, and what is being changed, by the apparently unappeasable force that is globalisation; and who are its owners and beneficiaries.

It is clear that security, stability, the easy answering of need in sustainable and traditional ways must all be swept away by the



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imperious necessities of the global market. Not the global free market, but a rigged version, which favours the already rich and powerful, and is policed by their institutions, on their terms. The fatalism with which this is promoted by the globalisers seeks to assimilate these processes to the natural order; as though the world economy were not a carefully wrought artefact, but a force of nature.

Of course this fatalism does have another purpose. It ensures continuity – the sustainability, not of the resource-base of the Earth, not of human well-being and security, but of wealth and power where these are already concentrated. It serves the conservation of privilege and the maintenance of inequality. Let it not be said that globalisation is not about conservation.

To those who would unmask these ugly processes, reverse or curtail them, the upholders of this diseased dualism, those bogus progressives, say: 'Oh you want to go back to the past.' This echoes the intolerance of an earlier generation of supporters of the status quo, who used to say to their critics: 'Go and live in Russia.' Now that Russia has embraced the same abrasive system, they are compelled to dismiss critics to an utterly inaccessible country – that of the distant past; and describe them as being in the grip of an incurable nostalgia.

Once more, the supporters of globalisation – that euphemism for world-wide capitalism – project onto their opponents

their own failings. For their disregard of the ruinous and destructive consequences of a hyperindustrialism without end, is itself a form of aggravated nostalgia. They seem bent on taking the world back to an even more remote past, to when chaos lay on the face of the Earth; a time recorded in the Book of Genesis. Nostalgia indeed.

The Left had a theory. It believed that history was on its side; and in the certainty of such a mighty ally, grew somnolent and complacent. Today's dissenters have no such support. History, it is clear, has changed sides; if indeed it had ever deserted the side of the powerful. It is not necessary to smash whichever city the World Bank and WTO or IMF are having their sinister and conspiratorial conferences in. Rather, our case requires not a watertight, consistent overarching theory, in imitation of our enemies, but a creative and imaginative rebuttal of the fundamental weaknesses of a system which defends the privilege of a small minority against the majority of humankind.

The arguments are all ours, if only we know how to deploy them with clarity, passion and imagination.

*Jeremy Seabrook is a writer and journalist.*

# HANDS UP IF YOU VOTED FOR EUROPE

THE UNDEMOCRATIC NATURE OF THE EU, SAYS PETER SHORE, SHOULD CONCERN ALL ITS CITIZENS – WHATEVER THEIR POLITICS

**BACK IN DECEMBER**, the British media turned its spotlight on the Nice Summit. Despite an increasingly 'Euro-sceptic' media, the Downing Street spinners managed brilliantly to underplay the significance of what was agreed. It is only now beginning to be understood.

Far from amounting to just a few innocent adjustments made necessary by enlargement, the Nice treaty removes most of the remaining obstacles to those determined to achieve the goal of political unification.

Indeed, our independence as a sovereign state, and the supremacy of our parliamentary democracy within it, is more seriously at risk than ever before in our peacetime history. Many times in our past we have seen enemy fleets in the channel and enemy armies encamped in the continental ports. This however is a European threat of a totally different kind: it is an invasion by stealth.

The threat today comes not from the brandished fist of military power but from a mixture of coercion, blandishment, deceit and self-deceit which have led successive British governments to transfer law- and policy-making power from our own parliament to the unelected institutions of the EU.

The scope of the European treaties, vastly enlarged at Maastricht in 1990 and again in Amsterdam in 1997, now embraces virtually every aspect of Britain's external and internal policies and interests. Nice has carried this a stage further. As a result, it is an unhappy but barely recognised truth that the policies as well as the laws of our land are now increasingly written, not by the UK parliament but by the Commission officials in Brussels, with only a qualified majority vote in the Council of Ministers to give them legitimacy.

This whole development, and what still lies ahead, should be at the very heart of our nation's politics. But until relatively recently, a long-enduring tacit coalition existed between the front benches of government and opposition – whether it was Labour or Conservatives in power – to deny the reality of what was happening, and to foster the claim that it is nothing more than a sensible development of co-operation between nation states. That front bench consensus has at last been abandoned, and one of our major political parties is now – hopefully – seriously anti-integrationist. The same is true of the media.

Nevertheless, great dangers remain. What is too frequently overlooked are the ongoing effects of the fundamentally undemocratic structure of the EU. The European Commission; the European Court of Justice, which overrides nation-state law whenever that law conflicts with the law of the European Communities; a bogus parlia-



THE RECENT CLIMATE  
CONFERENCE SHOWS  
THAT WE NEED MORE,  
NOT LESS, INTERNATIONAL  
ENGAGEMENT

ment which, while lacking both power and electoral legitimacy, undermines elected nation-state parliaments by claiming an alternative electoral legitimacy, and a Council of Ministers which increasingly decides both policy and law by discussions in secret and deals reached amongst themselves. All these institutions have two basic characteristics: they are mainly appointed, not elected, and their mission is to serve the proclaimed end of achieving 'an ever closer union' of European peoples, leading in fact, if not yet in name, to a European state.

This is, and should be, a non-party-political issue. What has been created, and what is sucking the lifeblood out of democracy in Westminster and in other European capitals, is a European supranational authority, usurping the rights that previously belonged to elected governments and parliaments. No-one would claim that any European democracy is perfect, but national governments are at least elected and accountable. The EU is neither, and yet its powers grow almost daily. The European Union signs treaties on behalf of its 15 member states.

At the WTO, Commissioner Lamy speaks to the rest of the world while the member states speak only to each other. Javier Solana is now the EU's High Representative and Secretary General of the European Council and speaks for all 15 Governments in dealings with the rest of the world.

Does it have to be like this? Is this a development which, as its supporters say, is virtually unstoppable? That would indeed be a gloomy prospect. For, if the EU model was all that was on offer, then the great prize of the democratic self-governing nation state would have to be surrendered to supranational, non-elected authorities in order to deal with the global problems of the new century. But it isn't so. Indeed, only in Western Europe, for reasons special to German and French history, is it even being essayed. Britain, like the other non-European states, needs to retain its democracy, and increase its participation in truly international agreements.

The recent Climate Conference in the Hague shows that we do need more, not less, international engagement. We have global problems which can only be solved by global agreements. But the task now is to develop new international instruments as changing needs demand; and to do so as independent nation states, accountable to their people. Nothing else will do.

*Peter Shore is a former Labour cabinet minister, and chairman of the Labour Euro Safeguards campaign. He is a member of the House of Lords.*



# DAMMED IF YOU DO

A RECENT WORLDWIDE LANDMARK REPORT HAS CONDEMNED THE BUILDING OF BIG DAMS FROM ALMOST EVERY SIDE. LORI POTTINGER EXPLAINS WHY IT COULD BE THE NAIL IN THEIR COFFIN.

**SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO** *The Ecologist* released *The Social and Environmental Effects of Large Dams*, a groundbreaking report that helped set off a widespread movement to stop the construction of destructive dams all over the world. Its tough-minded assessment of big dams and its call for a moratorium was considered radical at the time.

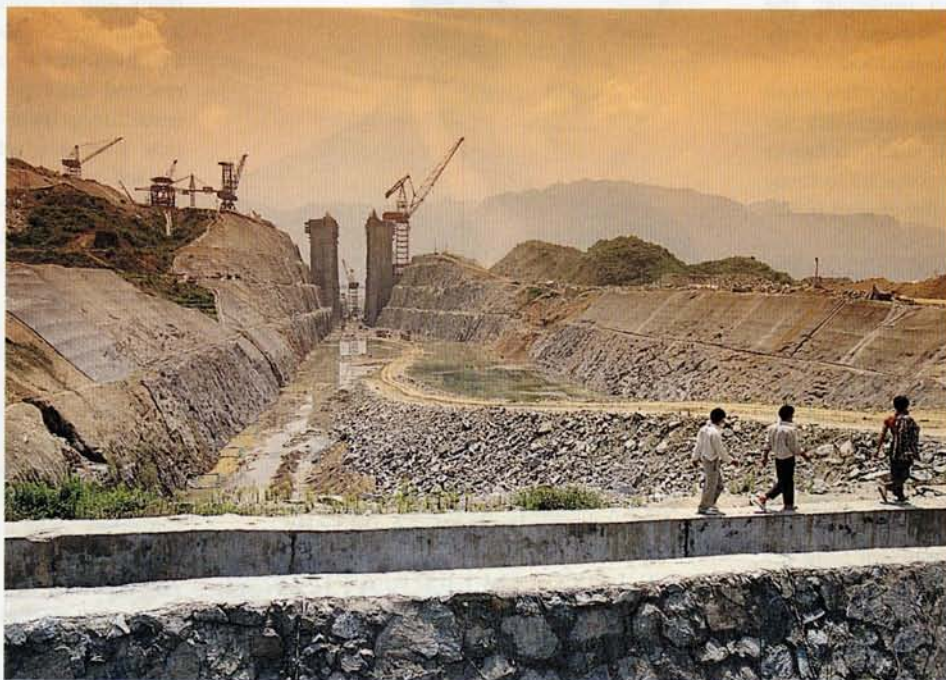
In November 2000, an independent body sponsored by the World Bank and including representatives of some of the world's biggest dam-building companies released a report that supports much of what *The Ecologist* first said back in 1984. If the report is widely adopted by the funders and builders of dams, it will pave the way for a new era of protecting rivers and the communities that depend upon them.

## DAMMING REPORT

The World Commission on Dams (WCD) came about in response to years of campaigning by NGOs and anti-dam activists, who demanded an independent body to review the true effectiveness of large dams and make recommendations for their future. Its mandate included devising internationally acceptable criteria and guidelines for planning, designing, construction, operation, monitoring, and decommissioning of dams. In its more than two years of research, field visits and public outreach, it studied 1,000 dams in detail. Its 12 commissioners came from a wide spectrum of backgrounds – ranging from Göran Lindahl, CEO of engineering giant ABB, to Medha Paktar, leading activist with India's Save the Narmada movement.

Its final report was unveiled with a flourish on 16 November last year – a report

**NOW THAT THE** *World Commission on Dams has published its report, will the world move to the next stage and get rid of dams altogether?*



which largely proves longstanding anti-dam campaigners to be right. Patrick McCully, campaigns director of the anti-dam group the International Rivers Network, believes, simply, that 'If the builders and funders of dams follow the recommendations of the WCD, the era of destructive dams should come to an end'.

The 404-page report, *Dams and Development* (which can be downloaded for free from [www.dams.org](http://www.dams.org)), provides stark evidence that the world's 45,000 large dams – which block over half of the world's rivers – have been failed experiments. They have failed to produce as much electricity and water, or control as much flood damage, as their backers claim. They regularly suffer huge cost-overruns and time delays. They have made up to 80 million people homeless, and their benefits have largely gone to the urban well-off not the rural poor they displace.

Their effects on ecosystems have been disastrous.

In the WCD report, the battle against big dams has a new and potent weapon. And campaigners have not been slow to use it. Hundreds of dam activists the world over marked the occasion of the report's launch

by challenging public funding agencies, including the World Bank and export credit agencies, to halt all support for dams until the Commission's recommendations are fully implemented. Local people in many countries are demanding reparations for social and environmental damage caused by dams. 'It is time for the iron triangle of governments, dam industry and funders to cease building dams until they have incorporated the WCD's recommendations into

their policies and practices,' proclaimed Liane Greeff of the South African NGO Environmental Monitoring Group.

The WCD's London launch was attended by hundreds of people from all sides of the debate, including political leaders from around the world, dam activists, dozens of often glum-faced industry representatives, and hordes of journalists. Nelson Mandela gave the keynote speech. James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, whose past responsibility for so many disastrous dams has been culpable, said, 'This report will help guide our work in the future... The critical test for us will be whether our borrowing countries and project financiers accept the recommendations of the Commission and want to build on them.'

The World Bank's press release was laden with tables and graphs showing the institution's decline in lending for large dams in recent years.

Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights at the UN, called the report

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a 'landmark document' and 'a road map for moving forward in our shared responsibility to make human rights a reality for all people'. She said the document 'highlights the growing recognition that, in an age of globalisation, greater efforts can and must be made to reconcile the need for economic growth with the need to protect the dignity of individuals, the cultural heritage of communities, and the health of the environment we all share'.

#### AROUND THE WORLD

The implications of the WCD's report are huge. If its recommendations are actually followed by dam builders and lenders, the big, destructive dams born of closed-door planning processes in the past will never be built again; dams like the vastly destructive Sardar Sarovar on India's Narmada river, where Medhar Paktar and thousands of others are promising to drown themselves if the dam is built. Sardar Sarovar does not meet the WCD's recommendations for compensation of displaced people, resettlement, financial cost recovery, public acceptance, efficiency, environmental impact... the list goes on.

The same goes for the controversial Ilisu dam on Turkey's Tigris river. The Ilisu project will flood more than 90 villages, including the historically unique site of the city of Hasankeyf. It will affect up to 78,000 people, mainly ethnic Kurds. It will cost at least \$1.6 billion. While the Turkish government refused to allow the WCD to study any of its dam projects it is clear that the Ilisu dam violates the principles of the WCD. No assessment of possible alternatives to building the dam (such as improving the efficiency of existing electricity supplies) has been carried out; local people have not been consulted

about their impending displacement; no study of the potential environmental or social impacts has been carried out. Kader Asmal, the Chairman of the WCD put it simply: 'We have not made a recommendation specifically about Ilisu,' he said, 'but it does not take much intelligence to see Ilisu does not meet the WCD guidelines for new dams.'

#### DIGGING IN

Although there was consensus among the WCD's commissioners on the final report and widespread approval by NGOs, unsurprisingly it left many in the dam industry feeling betrayed.

'The overall tone [of the report] is negative concerning the role of dams, generalising adverse impacts and understating the well-known social and economic benefits,' stated the International Hydropower Association in its press release on the very day of the report's release. The data was badly researched, they said. The negative effects of dams had been exaggerated. But it seemed a half-hearted attack. And when the IHP went on to suggest that the governments of 'developing' countries might see the report as 'interference', the counter-attack began to smack of desperation.

Meanwhile, some in the dam industry pledged to adopt the WCD report. The Swedish firm Skanska, for example, announced at the WCD launch that it welcomed the report and would follow its guidelines. 'We find the Commission's work to be extremely valuable,' says Axel Wenblad of the Skanska Group. 'It represents a major stride for sustainable development, with open and transparent processes in which all affected parties can participate, particularly those groups that are affected directly.' So much for business-as-usual.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

But will the release of the WCD report really lead to fewer destructive dams and more sustainable methods of energy and water supply? Some of the more radical campaigners are quick to point out that the Commission doesn't recommend a halt to dam construction, and in fact talks of the 'benefits' of dams and ways to mitigate their impacts.

Arundhati Roy, Booker Prize-winning author supporter of the Save the Narmada Movement, thinks that the report, far from being a breakthrough, may even help the dam builders if its words are not backed up by actions. 'There are a lot of very important things in the WCD report,' she said 'though it's obviously a compromise. The problem is that it can be used by the funding agencies to pretend they have an enlightened approach, while the reality remains completely different. The industry is learning our language and then carrying on just the same.'

Phil Williams, a hydrologist and anti-dam campaigner, agrees. He thinks the report has missed the point. 'The Commission,' he wrote recently in *The Guardian*, 'evading its main task of adjudicating the "development effectiveness" of dams, emphasises that it is poor planning of past dams that has caused unnecessary harm. This contradicts critics' charges that it is the dams themselves, no matter how well planned, that inevitably create unmitigated social and ecological impacts... The real question in the big dams debate is similar to that posed by nuclear power plants: not how to improve their planning, but how to get rid of them.'

*Lori Pottinger is Africa Campaigns Director at International Rivers Network in California, and the editor of the group's newsletter, World Rivers Review (www.irm.org).*

### DAMS AND DEVELOPMENT: THE WCD REPORT

#### KEY FINDINGS:

- Big dams have forced 40-80 million people from their homes and lands, with impacts including extreme economic hardship, community disintegration, and an increase in mental and physical health problems. Indigenous, tribal, and peasant communities have been particularly hard hit. People living downstream of dams have suffered from increased disease and the loss of natural resources upon which their livelihoods depended.
- Dams' impacts on ecosystems are 'mostly negative'. Large dams have led to the extinction of many fish and other aquatic species, the disappearance of birds in floodplains, huge losses of forest, wetland and farmland, erosion of coastal deltas, and many other unmitigatable impacts. Dams also contribute to climate change.
- The benefits of large dams have largely gone to the already well-off while poorer sectors of society have borne the costs.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- No dam should be built without the agreement of the affected people.
- Comprehensive and participatory assessments of the needs to be met, and alternatives for meeting these needs should be developed before proceeding with any new dam.
- Priority should be given to maximising the efficiency of existing water and energy systems before building any new dams.
- Environmental assessment should not be merely a formality.

# WHERE'S THE DEMOCRACY NOW?

EDWARD HERMAN REPORTS ON THE ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE BEST-KNOWN  
DISSENTING RADIO STATION IN THE US.

**THE DAILY NEWS** programme *Democracy Now!*, which has been carried on the non-profit Pacifica radio network for the past five years has been a rare and precious feature of an otherwise grim broadcasting scene in the United States. The programme departs regularly from the establishment news agenda which dominates not only commercial broadcasting but National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting System across most of the country. Its director, Amy Goodman, regularly uses dissident sources on standard topics like the Kosovo war, the military budget, election funding, the drug war and intervention in Colombia, and she gives access to presidential candidates such as Ralph Nader who are marginalised by the mainstream media and not permitted to debate issues. She works hard to make her programme a beacon of questioning, dissident journalism.

**NEW MANAGEMENT AT** *Pacifica radio is attempting to shut down its premier dissenting news programme, Democracy Now! But it will not go without a fight.*

All this is now at risk from a management takeover, political interference and the pressures of the market.

## DISSENT ON THE AIRWAVES

Pacifica is a five-station radio network that began operating in Berkeley, California, in 1949. It was specifically designed to be listener-supported, locally-based and locally-orientated, and to provide an alternative radio that would challenge the war-based economy and system of governance. It expanded from Berkeley to reach New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles, and Houston, Texas. For decades, it has been the only seriously dissident radio network in the United

1990s by a board faction determined to deradicalise the station and pursue their own political agenda. This group has steadily managed to reduce representation from the station and its advisory boards, culminating in bylaw changes in 1999 which made the board itself the exclusive selector of new board members. What this means for *Democracy Now!* seems increasingly clear: they want rid of it, and its troublesome questions.

## ATTACKING DIVERSITY

Amy Goodman soon found out what was going on. In September and October 2000, she was twice brought to Washington DC by the Pacifica management, first for admonishment on the 'tone and content' of her programming, and then to be threatened with termination unless she met a series of onerous work conditions applicable to her alone. This was the culmination



Goodman and *Democracy Now!* keep coming back to issues like East Timor, approved ethnic cleansing in Turkey, the West Bank, and Nato-occupied Kosovo, Lori Berenson imprisoned in Peru, Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier imprisoned in the United States, corporate abuse of the environment (as in oil exploration in the Niger delta and the Amazon), and capital punishment. Issues that officials and their mainstream media followers find inconvenient and not newsworthy, but which are vitally important if only because they are never covered elsewhere by the rest of the 'free' media.

States. This has made it especially important as public radio and TV in this country have been seriously constrained by political pressure and minimal funding, and commercial broadcasting is commercial broadcasting – entertainment-focused and tending either to avoid politics altogether, or to address it from establishment or right-wing viewpoints.

Pacifica, standing alone as a dissident and alternative network, has been the object of steady political attack ever since it was founded. Now those attacks are in danger of destroying it altogether.

Control of Pacifica was seized in the

of months of increasing harassment and growing hostility by the Pacifica management, and was clearly related to the dissident quality of *Democracy Now!* Effectively, the control group that for some years had been trying to rid the Pacifica stations of leftists and dissenters and bring the system within the mainstream was ratcheting up its act.

Goodman and *Democracy Now!* presented a serious problem because they are very popular, command a large and devoted audience, and have been important Pacifica fundraisers. The management, claiming to be pushing Pacifica toward the centre in

order to increase audience size, was stymied by a programme with a left and anti-establishment bent that was actually drawing larger numbers of listeners than the dumb-down and less political programmes favoured by the management. Ironically, in other words, the popularity of dissenting voices was the biggest obstacle to the management's aim of removing those voices from the air – in the name of the listeners.

Determined to remake the 'old Pacifica', which was based on employees, devoted local audiences, and a progressive and anti-status quo politics, into a 'new Pacifica' which would attract money and be politically 'relevant,' the coup management began to clean house, replacing dissident managers and programmers, and adding to the board businessmen expert in selling properties and dealing with recalcitrant unions. The management moved the Pacifica offices from Berkeley, California, to Washington DC, the city where many of the management's friends and allies are located. The reaction from the employees and audiences, however, was intense and severe. From 1995 to the present, Pacifica has been in turmoil, with unprecedented levels of strikes, firings, massive street protests, station lock-outs with replacement workers, and numerous law suits contesting management rights to transform the stations at their discretion.

**FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES**

The new Pacifica management has drawn much sustenance from Washington power brokers connected to the Democratic Party and the foreign policy establishment. The chairman of the Pacifica board from 1997 to 2000, Mary Francis Berry, who is still a board consultant, was a Democratic Party-appointed administrator in Washington, and a Party stalwart. Close allies of the Pacifica management, and regular advisers as well as funders, have been leaders of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and NPR. CPB President and CEO, Robert Coonrod, who has been closely involved with the Pacifica management for some years, spent most of his working life in the US foreign service and with the US propaganda agencies Voice of America and United States Information Agency. NPR is headed by a former Voice of America executive, Kevin Close. CPB Vice President Richard Madden has regularly intervened in Pacifica affairs to criticise its news coverage – most recently, WBAI's reporting of The Right to Return Rally held by Palestinians in Washington, DC – and to support and advise the management in its efforts to 'NPR-ise' the network.

The Pacifica management and political friends of the management were particularly

upset by Amy Goodman's friendly interview with Ralph Nader on the floor of the Republican Party convention during last year's Presidential election campaign. Former Pacifica top manager Pat Scott was urging Goodman to ease up on the Democrats years ago, and in a tough election year there were intensified pressures to get on board and not act as 'spoilers' to the chances of a Democrat victory. So political conformity – staying within the mainstream – was, and is, demanded of the underlings. The managers are part of an elite and mainstream culture, far distant from the traditional Pacifica audiences and employees. It has apparently never occurred to this group that audiences might actually be enlarged by more honest, questioning and alternative programmes like *Democracy Now!*

The counter-revolution from above has been distressingly successful so far. The

**'From 1995 to the present, Pacifica has been in turmoil, with unprecedented levels of strikes, firings, massive street protests, station lock-outs with replacement workers, and numerous law suits.'**

Washington DC, Houston, and Los Angeles stations have been brought into the mainstream, and the two stations still reflecting the 'old' Pacifica, WBAI in New York and KPFA in Berkeley, remain under threat. The attack on Amy Goodman, who is stationed at WBAI, marked a further step in the war for political conformity. It has been followed in November and December 2000, by the dismissal and replacement of WBAI's long-time general manager, the firing of dissident personnel, and a lock-out of others, as the Pacifica management attempts to push yet another station into the mainstream. This has produced a new wave of protests from traditional Pacifica audiences.

**THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION**

An important feature of the counter-revolution has been its use of censorship as an instrument for weeding out dissidents as well as pressing for political conformity in news reporting. For years, the management has imposed 'gag rules,' preventing any discussion of Pacifica-related issues on its news programmes. Progressives and just plain believers in free speech who have stubbornly persisted in violating the rules, have been fired. This has decimated the stations of dis-

senters via supposed 'personnel' decisions. It seems as though Amy Goodman is being set up for a fall by means of the same process – fixing new and unreasonable work rules, the violation of which will result in termination. The reality seems clear: this is political censorship, barely veiled.

While the employees and traditional audiences of Pacifica have been putting up a strong fight against the counter-revolution, it has been amazing to see how many free speech advocates, liberals, and even leftists have stood by without protest as the last US network bastion of anti-establishment news and opinion has been threatened with extinction. A petition was even circulated last year with signatures from several dozen erstwhile leftists from *The Nation* magazine and Institute for Policy Studies, protesting at – unbelievably – 'management bashing' by defenders of the old Pacifica. This is a form of self destruction, which is helping to sink a media institution that was their ally and would be important for their effectiveness.

One of the great lessons of media history, illustrated in part by the effects of the demise of the social democratic press in Britain in the 1960s, is that without a dissenting media, any alternative politics, and the ability to build and maintain a grassroots political base is at a grave disadvantage. This is a lesson that the new Pacifica management either have not learned or, simply, do not care about.

But this battle over the soul of dissenting radio in the United States is not yet over. There are at least three court cases in progress contesting the Pacifica management's right to transform the institution at will; and the old Pacifica supporters are still fighting vigorously, even if they have been abandoned by too many civil libertarians and other potential allies. *Democracy Now!*'s political convention coverage during the election campaign last year was telecast via satellite and community television networks by Deep Dish TV in collaboration with Free Speech TV. DeeDee Halleck and Michelle Syverson are working to build on that success with a daily national video feed of the programme, with or without Pacifica. This could transform *Democracy Now!* into the first on-going national progressive daily television news programme in the US. One wonders what the Pacifica management would have to say about that.

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# WHERE NOW FOR THE WORLD'S CLIMATE?

OVER THE NEXT FIVE PAGES, *ECOLOGIST* WRITERS EXAMINE KEY CLIMATE ISSUES. FIRST, PETER BUNYARD REPORTS ON RECENT GLOBAL NEGOTIATIONS.

**THE FAILURE OF** the climate meeting in The Hague last November was a disaster for the Kyoto Protocol – the 1997 agreement set up to agree greenhouse gas emissions reductions for ‘developed’ countries. But was it a disaster for the planet? Certainly it leaves agreements on reductions as far off as ever, but let’s not forget that the reductions agreed at Kyoto – 5 per cent lower than 1990 levels by 2010 – were never anywhere near adequate compared to the scale of the problem. The US, the world’s biggest emitter, scuppered the Hague talks. But even if they had succeeded, climate change would still race ahead of our efforts to control it.

The fact is that such paltry cuts, even were they to be achieved, would do little to stem dramatic increases in surface temperatures, at best offsetting by a fraction of a degree the temperature that would be attained without them. To make matters worse, improvements in climate science indicate much higher temperature increases and far more violent weather conditions compared with the models of a decade ago. In 1992 the IPCC – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – stated that a ‘business-as-usual’ scenario, with unmitigated greenhouse gas emissions, would lead to an average surface temperature increase of between 1.5°C and 4.5°C a century from now, with 2.5°C being the figure banded about as centre of the range. Now, the latest models from the UK Meteorological Office’s Hadley Climate Research Centre indicate temperature increases of more than 6°C with as much as 10°C increases towards the poles. If this happens, it could well be curtains for human civilisation.

The question now is: where next? The answer is clear. Those of us who are really serious about global warming – a category that apparently does not include most of

**THE TALKS IN** *The Hague failed because of US intransigence. But even if they had succeeded, they would not have been enough.*



**Pie in your eye:** US chief negotiator Frank Roy is pided by a protester at the United Nations climate talks in The Hague last November.

the world’s politicians – had better start getting those emissions down irrespective as to whether the US and its accomplices are on board. True, the world’s biggest emitter had better get serious soon. But maybe the rest of the world forging ahead without it would make its people and/or politicians realise the plight they are setting up for themselves.

Indeed, it doesn’t take much foresight to realise that tackling greenhouse gas emissions could well be a win-win situation, with more efficient energy systems, cleaner vehicles, better public transport, the deployment of renewable technologies, more comfortable homes, less pollution and a safer, healthier environment as the benefits – quite apart from the climatic considerations.

## FACING FOSSIL FACTS

Yet we shouldn’t forget that fossil fuels, especially oil and natural gas, are phenomenally cheap for what they give us. One reasonably fit human working non-stop,

24 hours a day, for more than two weeks, would just about consume the energy in one gallon of petrol. Any country that unilaterally puts a brake on its fossil fuel consumption whilst others are cavalierly

blowing out greenhouse gases, is truly shooting itself in the economic foot. It is just that kind of consideration which made the US balk at signing up to Kyoto in 1997, and following it up at The Hague. It might have done so, it said, were developing countries such as India and China to put limits on their own use of fossil fuels in racking up their fast-growing economies.

Well, as Aubrey Meyer and his friends at the Global Commons Institute are fond of pointing out, there is that little matter of historical emissions and of equity. Indian politicians do find some discrepancy in their country’s per capita

emissions of greenhouse gases compared to those in the US – some 0.24 tonnes of carbon per person in India compared to 5.5 tonnes in the US. If we are to have a hope of stabilising carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere at no higher than 550 parts per million – which would still be double pre-industrial levels – then, on an equitable basis, each of the world’s 6 billion people would have rights to emit no more than 0.4 tonnes of carbon as carbon dioxide or methane. China, emitting 3.5 times more carbon per person than India, clearly has no room left for manoeuvre, while we in the UK would have to cut back fivefold and the US more than tenfold on current rates. A tall order in the short term, but that shouldn’t stop us making a start.

In terms of curbing climate change, the Kyoto Protocol is already years out of date and, even had it been agreed to in The Hague, the loopholes regarding carbon sinks would have made it virtually pointless. Every year, every month, every

moment, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is being measured and what we see is that at least half of that emitted from fossil fuel burning and from land-use change is staying up there, currently at the rate of some additional 1.5 parts per million per year. That accumulation should warn us that the most effective, guaranteed way of stabilising levels is by cutting back on emissions. For, if the land and oceans were gulping down the CO<sub>2</sub> as fast as we could put it up there, we wouldn't be talking about anthropogenic global warming.

#### LOOPING THE LOOPHOLES

But perhaps The Hague was doomed from the start. Several loopholes had been agreed even prior to the meeting. Australia, for instance, had its request accepted that the carbon estimated to have been emitted from deforestation should be included in its 1990 baseline year inventory. That gave it an extra 0.8 per cent to play with. A number of countries with their 'economies in transition', including Hungary, Poland, Romania and others from eastern Europe, were allowed to use a year later than 1990 as baseline. Since their emissions had by then increased, they too gained by having an easier target. And, should carbon trading take off, they would have more 'certifiable emissions' to sell. Greenpeace picked these loopholes apart, showing just what a scam it would be were they to be allowed in place of real cuts in domestic emissions.

#### CLEANUP?

Then there's the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) – potentially a massive loophole. The idea behind the CDM is that industrialised countries fund projects in developing countries that lead to an overall reduction in emissions. The investor benefits from the 'certified emission reductions' which can be subtracted from the target reductions required, and the developing country benefits from 'environmentally sustainable economic development'.

But as with the other loopholes, the net result is no reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions. CDMs can be of two kinds: one involves investment in carbon sinks, through means like forestry projects and land use changes: the other involves investment in 'cleaner technologies'. For instance, were a developing country to claim that it had planned a conventional coal-fired station, but through the CDM was instead building a 'combined-cycle' gas power plant or a solar power plant, it would gain the investment and the industrialised country the carbon credits. The nuclear industry obviously loves the notion

of it being categorised as 'clean'.

The CDM would be beneficial if it were to accelerate the development of relatively clean power-generating technologies, including renewable energy systems, such as solar, wind, tidal and perhaps mini-hydro, but not nuclear. On the other hand, to qualify ex-patria land mass as negotiable carbon sinks, so that those in the industrialised world can continue with their profligate emissions, is nothing short of neo-colonialism. 'Is it fair', asks Greenpeace, 'that some Annex 1 populations that may be emitting 350 times the greenhouse gases per capita of a rural subsistence farmer in the South, now have the right to appropriate 350 times as much land in the South to offset this?'

In addition, as with all such putative sinks, we cannot guarantee that they will last, especially were climate change to bring about forest die-back as well as increased soil respiration and the loss of organic carbon. And what if the project caused social unrest and the displacement of people who were then forced to move into marginal lands or into city slums? Indigenous peoples, whose lands may be considered eligible for sink projects, or who could bear the brunt of such projects in neighbouring colonised regions, so far have had virtually no say in the negotiations of the 'parties' at successive COPs. They have declared their unequivocal opposition to land use change and forest projects being considered legitimate carbon sinks.

If countries were allowed to make maximum use of all these loopholes, then they would have 3 GtC/yr (3,000 million tonnes of carbon per year) available to set against their Kyoto commitments – three times more than the total required for emission reductions. That's how ludicrous the situation could turn out to be.

The logic of the loopholes lets everyone off the hook. Meanwhile, through carbon credit exchange, the commercial world gets immeasurably wealthier; and even though the climate is deteriorating rapidly, with more and more people suffering, the world economy booms. That is the reality of the commodification of climate change. To take it to its absurd limits, the US economist Nordhaus has found that the economic gains in leisure and recreational activities just about balance out the damages resulting from climate change. His analysis suggests that even though three times as many Chinese would probably die from the impact of global warming than would be so without climate change, the increased mortality would be more than compensated for by the overall recreational gains made by

the surviving Chinese population. Applied worldwide, such economic nonsense suggests that because worldwide agriculture represents no more than 3 per cent of total gross world product, it wouldn't matter if it were wholly destroyed in the cataclysm of climate change.

#### A FUTURE FOR KYOTO?

So how flexible, if at all, should the Kyoto Protocol be? Can it be saved, and is it worth it? The European Union's position has always called for a 'quantified' limit to be imposed on the Protocol Mechanisms. According to the EU, all Annex 2 parties must take proper measures to limit their emissions domestically. At most, no country should be allowed to offset more than 30 per cent of its required reductions by means of the Kyoto Mechanisms.

Basically the European Commission finds that a 15 per cent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2012 would be technically feasible among its member states without onerous economic penalties. Improved fuel economy vehicles, increased energy efficiency in industry and the home, fuel-switching in the power generation sector, plus more combined heat and power, deployment of renewable energy sources and biomass fuels. Methane emissions are to be curbed through better management of animal manures, recovery of landfill gas and improved leak detection and repair.

And according to a recent US government study, *Scenarios for a Clean Energy Future*, the US could virtually meet its Kyoto target from domestic policies that promoted energy efficient technologies and renewable energy systems, with little or no net cost to the economy. One scenario, the 'Advanced Scenario' indicated that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions could be brought close to 1990 levels by 2010 with overall economic savings of some three per cent. But the White House global warming coordinator at COP 6, Roger Ballantine, would have none of it. 'The new US government report', he said, 'does not in any way reflect the Administration's policy.'

But the climate itself is not all that impressed with this wrangling over flexible mechanisms. It will change anyway. So, let's make sure we expose 'flexibility' for the sham that it is, and that any deal brokered next May in Bonn between the EU and the US does not include ecologically and politically suspect sinks. In the meantime, why not start putting into practice policies that keep greenhouse gases for the most part well and truly fossilised?

Peter Bunyard is science editor of *The Ecologist*.

# RENEWED HOPE

BRITAIN HAS ONE OF THE WORST RECORDS IN EUROPE ON RENEWABLE ENERGY USE, BUT THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM EXISTS. CASPAR HENDERSON REPORTS.

**A FRIEND OF** mine was cycling in Ireland. She was pedalling straight into a heavy wind, and it was tough going. A passing motorist saw she was in difficulty and stopped to ask what the problem was. When she explained, he replied 'Sure, why don't you go the other way then?'

The question may seem absurd, but maybe the man was talking sense. Sometimes it's helpful to ask why a body is so determined to go in a particular direction in the first place. Environmentalists and others have been making this kind of challenge to the world economy for several decades, often to be dismissed as cranks.

Since at least the 1980s, when the potential seriousness of man's impact on the climate became apparent, there have been calls for a 'Manhattan Project for the Environment'. The analogy is with the tremendous application of talent, money and material made by the UK and US in World War Two to develop an atomic bomb before Nazi Germany did. Today, the challenge is to develop peaceful technologies to massively reduce society's environmental impact. Renewable energy technologies like wind, solar and wave power are seen as a key part of this transformation.

At last, it seems, governments and parts of industry are not only listening but hearing and even acting. Few are the politicians today who do not claim to have at least a vision of a 'low-carbon economy'. And wind power is one of the world's fastest growing industries.

But there's no guarantee that the baby steps being taken in Britain will be sufficient, and there's a real danger of the baby being thumped on the head unless sustained popular pressure is mobilised.

**THE ONLY THING** standing in the way of an energy revolution in the UK is lack of political will.

## RENEWING BRITAIN

Britain has a target to deliver 10 per cent of its electrical power from renewable resources by 2010. And despite what you might hear from some quarters, superb natural and technical resources already exist that could make this possible. All that is lacking is the political will.

At present, 'new' renewables (such as landfill gas, wind, solar, wave power and

**'We must continue to press for a wholesale transformation of the economy, including the transport sector.'**

small- [emphatically not large-] scale hydro) contribute around one per cent to the UK's electrical generating capacity. Generating power from landfill gas is already fully economic, but has limited scope for growth as the country moves away from landfilling waste. Energy recovery from waste is highly controversial and also limited in capacity (it takes a lot of power to burn the rubbish in the first place). So if Britain is to meet its interim target of five per cent by 2003 and 10 per cent by 2010, it must look to other renewables for growth.

## WINDS OF CHANGE

Most bets are on wind power, especially offshore. 'The priority has to be offshore wind. That's where all our efforts should

be' says Steven Byers, the newly-green Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

And some of the headlines look good. Last October, Britain's first offshore wind site was completed at Blyth in Northumberland. This £4mn project features two of the world's most powerful wind turbines, rated at 2MW each (one megawatt is equal to a million watts), providing enough power for 3,000 households.

Nevertheless, once you look beyond such high profile cases, Britain is the wind pygmy. Less than one per cent of the 3GW (1GW = 1 billion watts) of wind power installed across western Europe last year was in Britain. In one year, Germany installed almost 1.6GW of new capacity – five times the entire capacity installed in the UK over the last decade.

And yet Britain's potential wind resource is vast – estimated at between 2GW and 4GW onshore and a further 4GW to 30GW offshore, depending on the extent of deployment. The DTI says that there may be \$6bn worth of commercial potential for offshore wind farms. A potential growth industry if ever there was one.

And wind technology gets better all the time. New turbines are significantly more robust and efficient than the models of just two or three years ago. Larger in size (many with blade spans of over 70 metres), they generate between 1MW and 2MW each (enough power for 750 households or more), greatly increasing the power density of a wind farm. Designs nearing production stage will double this capacity again. The result is rapidly shrinking costs.

Some of the first detailed and reliable surveys of public opinion show that most

people in Britain are now decisively in favour of more wind turbines. A study for the Scottish Executive last summer found that the great majority of people are 'generally positive about wind farms', and that those living near a wind farm were 'more likely to provide positive responses than those [further away]'. Overall, '74 per cent of respondents said there was nothing they disliked about wind farms. Only 11 per cent said that there was nothing they liked'.

Evidence suggests that Scottish attitudes are increasingly shared elsewhere in the UK. A 70 metre wind turbine in Swaffham, Norfolk, designed by Norman Foster, is now the town's biggest tourist attraction with disappointed visitors being turned away because the queue for the viewing platform is too long. And in Gloucestershire a poll last autumn found that eight out of 10 residents supported the aim of supplying 10 per cent of the county's electricity from local wind projects. On the strength of this, a company called Next Generation has submitted a planning application to build four new wind turbines near the picturesque Cotswold town of Stroud.

#### LANDSCAPE ISSUES

On the national scale, the British Wind Energy Association argues that the impact on the landscape would be surprisingly small. In England, says BWEA, a quarter of the 10 per cent renewables target could be met on under 0.2 per cent (419 km<sup>2</sup>) of the nation's total land area. This would require around 2,500 1.5MW turbines spread evenly across the regions on land that could also be used for grazing, crops and other purposes – not just in those places with highest winds – so that every part of the country benefits. There are currently about 800 wind turbines onshore in the UK.

Even some observers without an environmental agenda or a vested interest in the wind industry are now saying that wind could even overtake combined cycle gas turbines (CCGT) as the preferred new source of power generation in the second decade of the 21st century. Recently, Greenpeace and

the German Wind Energy Institute suggested that the North Sea's 400 oil and gas platforms be replaced with offshore wind farms, providing power for Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark. All it would take, they suggested, was a little political will.

But here's the problem. Offshore wind does not quite pay for itself when judged by conventional economic measures which take virtually no account of the impact of climate destabilisation and other forms of environmental destruction caused by conventional energy generation. It is coming pretty close, but the pump still needs to be primed.

And while the government gives in to corporate and political pressure to 'pick winners' in some areas like aerospace – allocating £500 million of public money for a new jet fighter, for example – it remains more cautious when it comes to popular types of technology that could help save the world.

#### OBLIGATIONS

At present, official hopes are pinned on the Renewables Obligation, and funds made available from the Climate Change Levy and elsewhere. The Renewables Obligation guarantees a market for those renewables systems that are closest to economic viability on a 'conventional' definition. The Obligation provides an incentive for power companies either to generate 10 per cent of their power from renewables by 2010 or to buy 'green credits' from others who exceed this target.

Also, in the short term, offshore wind projects will receive a £39mn grant from the DTI, and a share of £50mn from the new opportunity fund derived from the National Lottery. Alan Moore, Managing Director of National Wind Power, says the grants should be sufficient to enable the construction of five or six 'reasonable size' offshore wind farms, each generating around 50MW from 20 to 25 turbines.

This is certainly an excellent start, but it is not enough. At very best, the measures

will help to deliver 10 per cent of electricity from renewable resources by 2010, without touching energy use in the rest of the economy.

So what can be done to boost renewables further?

First, dismiss the naysayers and those with links to the nuclear industry (the third-born of the original Manhattan Project, after fissile and thermonuclear weapons) who ridicule even the government's modest target. Meeting it would mean installing two large turbines every day, says Ian Fells of the University of Northumberland – implying that such a feat would be well-nigh impossible. In 1999 in Germany an average of six 1MW turbines were put up every working day. So much for that.

Second, continue to press for a wholesale transformation of the economy, including the transport sector. Greenpeace offers one model. The campaigning group proposes a £500mn green fund, to kick-start the uptake of compressed natural gas and biodiesel as vehicle fuels, plus a network of electric buses in areas of worst air quality – both of these as interim steps while a national hydrogen distribution network is installed.

True, £500 million is a lot of money. But consider the bill for that shiny state-of-the-art jet fighter to put it in perspective, and then the comparable cost of offering a new vision to the world.

Greenpeace may not have all the answers, and it's important to be clear-eyed about the scale of some of the challenges.

'A solar industry supplying just two per cent of primary energy by 2025 would probably be producing some 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> of photo-voltaic panels a year – six times current European production of plate glass,' says Mark Moody-Stuart of Shell, that favourite of environmentalists and human rights workers. Thanks, Mark. We need forecasts like this to help us understand the scale of the challenge – and then to go ahead and meet it.

*Caspar Henderson is a freelance journalist.*



# CORAL DECLINE

THE WORLD'S CORAL REEFS FACE EXTINCTION  
IF RADICAL ACTION ISN'T TAKEN. CASPAR HENDERSON REPORTS.

**SHORTLY BEFORE LAST** year's highly-publicised Climate Conference in the Hague, a panel of the world's most eminent coral reef scientists issued a stark warning that illustrated just how widespread the effects of climate change will be. Among its many other negative effects, they warned, will be the death of reefs all over the world as a result of warming seas.

Speaking towards the close of the 9th International Coral Reef Symposium, one of the Olympic events of marine science, attended by nearly 2,000 top researchers from over 50 countries, the panel painted a picture of almost unremitting gloom and called for decisive action.

'We call for an effective reduction in greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade', said Yossi Loya, Professor at the Department of Zoology at the Faculty of Life Sciences at Tel Aviv University in Israel and the recipient of the Year 2000 Darwin Medal for Lifetime Contribution in Coral Reef Research.

The biggest warning sign so far that the world's corals are in serious trouble was the massive coral bleaching that occurred in 1997-98. In large areas of the Indian Ocean, more than 90 per cent of the corals died. Coral bleaching occurs when the symbiotic algae that live in corals become stressed and are expelled. This turns corals white, leaving them in an unhealthy state. Research presented at the conference revealed that rising temperatures have been responsible for large scale bleaching and mortality events in 1999 and 2000.

Such death rates are virtually unprecedented. And the overwhelming majority of scientists at the symposium agreed that climate change is the cause.

Reef-building corals have created the richest and most biodiverse habitats on earth. It is estimated they contribute at least US\$400 billion a year to the world economy, forming an essential part of the livelihoods of around 500 million people. Living reefs also protect vulnerable coastlines from sea surge; an almost priceless service.

'We are not appreciating the true economic value of these resources,' says Hugh Kirkman, who directs UNEP's East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit,

**CLIMATE CHANGE** and irresponsible fishing practices are wiping out coral all over the world

'and too often our efforts are like sticking band-aids on a great wound.'

The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network presented a report on the status of the world's reefs to the Symposium. It concluded that, only two years after a survey of the world's coral reefs found 11 per cent had been destroyed by human activity, a more extensive assessment by around 80 countries of their own reefs had raised the total to 27 per cent 'effectively' lost by late 2000. 'At least another 25 per cent will be lost within twenty years', said Clive Wilkinson of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, who edited the report.

'The fact that all major climate models show that the current increases in sea temperature will continue, is a source of major concern', said Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg of the Centre for Marine Sciences at the University of Queensland, Australia. 'We have insufficient evidence that corals are able to acclimatise or adapt fast enough to these sort of changes. This is a clear area for priority research'.

'There have been similar rates of climate change in geological history, and we are able to explain these by natural phenomena', said Mark Eaken, Director of Paleoclimatology for the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration in Washington DC, 'but the changes we are currently witnessing can only be explained on the basis of human induced impacts'.

The fossil record shows that coral reefs have recovered from such global scale climatic events in the distant past. But this has typically taken between two and 100 million years.

Increases in sea temperature are far from the only concern. 'Newly emergent diseases are raging through the corals of the Caribbean', said Richard Aronson, Senior Marine Scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory in Alabama. 'Most of these diseases are very difficult indeed to get a handle on, and they are starting to get a hold in the Pacific'.

Destructive fishing practices such as the use of dynamite and cyanide are even more immediate threats to reefs than climate change and disease, says Lida Pet-Soede, WWF Indonesia's Programme Manager for Fisheries. Up to 80 per cent of Indonesia's reefs have been severely degraded in this way.

Involving local communities who have a direct stake in the continuing wellbeing of their reefs is the key, says Rili Djohani of The Nature Conservancy, a US-based conservation programme that works in Indonesia. 'There are innovative and creative models for us to build on.'

But, according to Djohani, it's a race against time. 'The pressures are increasing hugely.' Regions like South East Asia, home to the richest and most diverse coral ecosystems, are also undergoing rapid economic and population growth combined with political turbulence. In most countries, conservation budgets have been cut

by 80 per cent since the economic crisis of 1997/98. In Indonesia, exports of fish caught illegally, much of it from reefs in ways that cause severe degradation, are thought to be twice as large as legal exports.

Hoegh-Gulberg agreed that such direct effects from human action were an enormous threat to coral reefs, but added that this was not a good reason for ignoring the danger of climate change. 'Just because you have a rhino charging at you and it's only 20 metres away, doesn't mean you should completely ignore an angry bull elephant which is 50 metres away'.

Kirkman says the over-riding challenge is greater co-ordination. Present conservation efforts resemble 'a mob of people kicking footballs around a poorly-defined field'. Ironically, the symposium itself perhaps provided one example of this. In addition to funding by Western aid agencies, its sponsors include Southern Pacific Petroleum/Central Pacific Minerals. This Australian company is exploiting an oil shale reserve estimated to hold 29 billion barrels of oil equivalent and situated only a few yards from the edge of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Oil shale is among the most carbon intensive of fossil fuels.

*Caspar Henderson is a freelance journalist.*



# HOLIDAY ILLS

WITH TOURISM ON THE INCREASE, MARGARET REICHLIN MAKES A PLEA FOR MORE RESEARCH INTO THE EFFECTS OF HOLIDAY CHEMICALS.

'WHERE ARE YOU going on holiday this year?... Oh, how gorgeous. All that lovely sun... Got your flight booked? Had all your jabs?... And got your bug stuff? Remember the sunscreen... Have a wonderful time.'

And off we go, with inoculations, sunscreens, insect repellent, insecticides, both spray and slow-release, and new mosquito nets. What could possibly go wrong?

To be honest, we don't know the full extent of the dangers, but there are alarming indications that illness and even death may be the result of the combinations of chemicals absorbed through the skin by holiday-makers today. And one researcher has suggested that illness akin to Gulf War Syndrome may even be possible. The problem lies in the 'cocktail' of chemicals that we absorb through the course of a holiday.

A traveller starts at the airport and boards the plane, with its full complement of fire retardants, stain resistants, and the other protective chemicals. At some airports, the cabin is sprayed with insecticides, the chemicals used probably being pyrethroids. D-Phenothrin is approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for this purpose. Permethrin is now ubiquitous, and travellers may be enjoying the benefits of these while still dealing with inoculations.<sup>1</sup>

Upon arrival at the destination, it's on with the insect protection, often DEET (Diethyltoluamide). This may come with a range of other ingredients and propellants, such as Isobutane, N-Butane, Alcohol denat, Propane, caprylic/capric or triglycerides.<sup>2</sup> A range of chemist-recommended insecticides may include Prallethrin, Bio-allethrin, Tetramethrin, D-Allethrin, all pyrethroids, or even Dichlorvos, which is currently under review.<sup>3</sup> In addition the hotel may already be using its own insecticides.

Then there is sunscreen, which will usually contain at least 20 ingredients, most of which will be absorbed by skin quickly. Going out at night? Then it's on with deodorant, perfumes...

So where does the Gulf War come into all this? Professor Mohamed Abou-Donia is a leader in the field of research into the 'cocktail effect' of chemicals. His work, first with chickens, then with rats, involved the three main chemicals used in the Gulf War. Each was regarded as fairly harmless on its



**CHEMICAL COCKTAILS** can be dangerous, yet they're almost unavoidable when we go on holiday.

own, but they were used collectively to protect troops. These chemicals were DEET, Permethrin and Pyridostigmine Bromide.<sup>4</sup>

Professor Abou-Donia's work showed that combinations of chemicals are not a matter of addition of effect, but of multiplication. When toxic chemicals enter the body they should be detoxified by enzymes and proteins, but if these are occupied by dealing with the first chemical, then new chemicals might be able to advance, combining toxicities as they go.

Each of the chemicals in Abou-Donia's work can be tolerated up to a point that varies in each human body. His experiments with chickens showed that exposed to any combination of two chemicals the birds experienced weight loss, diarrhoea, shortness of breath, leg weakness, or tremors. The combination of three produced paralysis or even death.<sup>5</sup>

Now chickens, of course, are not humans, and the final blame for Gulf War Syndrome is still being heavily disputed. In short, the full effect of chemical cocktails on humans is still to be measured. Yet people are still travelling, supported by products backed by governmental health departments, and coming home complaining of anything from respiratory problems to apparent viruses.

Some don't come home at all. What if the traveller, as so sadly happened to two young, healthy girls in 1999, dies suddenly abroad for no apparent reason? Does anyone ask about chemical usage, even when

one of them was known to have used DEET on the night she died? Do not the verdicts themselves prompt questions? 'Sudden Adult Death Syndrome'? 'Exertion in a strange environment'?<sup>6</sup>

The potential effects of these chemicals, when taken alone, is not well-known to the general public. Pyrethrum was a relatively safe insecticide (though nothing that is designed to kill living organisms is ever really safe) but its effects were limited, so when the public began to be aware of the dangers of man-made pesticides such as DDT and Lindane, and turned to 'natural' ones, 'Pyrethrum' was often listed large on the nice green label, and only in the very small print did one find Piperonyl Butoxide, used as an enhancer. Here we are in the world of synergies, well understood when in the interests of manufacturers. Piperonyl Butoxide works by decreasing the body's ability to toxify other chemicals. It can cause kidney, liver and adrenal damage. If the synergistic effects are so clearly recognised when in the interests of industry, why are they ignored in the area of the public's safety?

The effects of organophosphates are now fairly well-known, and anyone who wishes to know more can obtain a copy of MS 17, *Medical Aspects of Work Related Exposure to Organo-phosphates* from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk. And anyone thinking of buying a Dichlorvos insecticide for their summer holiday should be aware that it is currently under review by the Pesticide Safety Directorate.

It is one of the problems of the growing chemical load in our lives that no one records the total load in any home or workplace. No wonder most people have a desire to head to that faraway place where the air is warm and clean and the sun always shines. But what is the reality? You are leaving behind a chemical soup. What are you heading towards? What chemical cocktail are you concocting for yourself? It is time we found out.

*Margaret Reichlin is a pesticide victim. Further information on chemical cocktails can be found in Vyvyan Howard's Synergistic effects of chemical mixtures from The Ecologist Vol 27 No 5. Copies of this issue can be ordered from Sally Snow on (+44) (0)20 7351 3578, price £4. References on page 65.*



The Government's second White Paper on International Development, published last December, is most notable – as its title suggests – for its wholehearted embrace of globalisation as a positive force for poverty eradication. As a result, it has generated the most widespread debate on globalisation in this country since the collapse of the World Trade Organisation negotiations in Seattle just over a year ago.

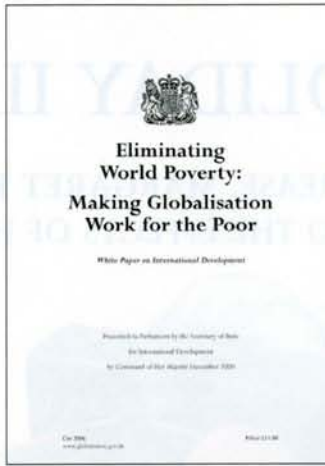
The tone of that debate was set by newspaper interviews with Secretary of State Clare Short the day before the White Paper's publication, in which she launched a wild (and unsubstantiated) attack on 'intolerable' green protestors and 'self-indulgent' anti-globalisation demonstrators, whom she accused of hypocritically enjoying the benefits of development themselves, while denying them to the poorest people of the planet.

In fact, tucked away in this White Paper there are a number of individual measures to support. These include policy commitments to unilaterally untie Britain's aid budget so that recipients can spend it to get best value, not to boost British industry; a new Commission on Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) to ensure that that IPR regimes 'take greater account of the interests of developing countries and poor people'; measures to enable governments to reclaim money illicitly banked in London; and an increase in the aid budget to 0.33 per cent of GNP by 2003/4 – still way off the UN target of 0.7 per cent, but at least moving in the right direction.

Unfortunately, however, the potential of these measures to achieve significant poverty eradication will be completely undermined by the bigger story – the government's blind faith in the drive to open up markets in poor countries.

The White Paper starts with the bold assertion that globalisation creates unprecedented new opportunities for sustainable development and poverty reduction, as well as enabling faster progress in achieving the international development targets. The challenge, apparently, is 'to connect more people from the world's poorest countries with the benefits of the new global economy'. This overlooks the fact that many developing countries are already deeply integrated into the global economy, with a far greater proportion of their GNP dependent on exports than most developed countries, but the majority of the population seeing little or no benefit from it. The key issue, rather, is the terms on which those countries are connected to the global economy.

This apolitical, over-simplistic, analysis continues in Short's re-definition of the



## ELIMINATING WORLD POVERTY MAKING GLOBALISATION WORK FOR THE WORLD'S POOR

Department for International  
Development White Paper  
DECEMBER 2000

very term globalisation. Apparently those of us who thought it referred to neo-liberal economic policies, minimising the role of the state, and leading to increasingly open and integrated economies, are wrong. 'In fact, globalisation means the growing interdependence and inter-connectedness of the modern world.' This woolly, cosy definition allows Short to wax lyrical about the spread of democracy and human rights without understanding that these have got very little to do with globalisation as most of us understand it. Her confusion – wilful or not – rests in her failure to distinguish between globalisation and internationalism. It is the latter which is characterised by the global flow of technology and ideas, the spread of democracy, and the growing number of international environmental and human rights agreements.

By contrast, globalisation – by which most of us mean unfettered free trade, ruthless competition, deregulation and liberalisation – is actually making some of the poorest in the world poorer. This is not only the view of the NGOs. A recent World Bank study by Lundberg and Squire found that greater openness to trade does lead to income growth among the top 60 per cent of the population, but has the opposite effect among the poorest 40 per cent. The study points out that the poor are far more vulnerable to shifts in relative international prices, and this vulnerability is magnified by the country's openness to trade. It concludes that, at least in the short term, globalisation appears to increase both

poverty and inequality.

A further fundamental flaw in the White Paper is its analysis of the development gains in East Asia and China. The fact that this region of the world is one where poverty has declined is not a victory for globalisation and break-neck liberalisation, as claimed by Short. The reality is that the major advances in development occurred in these countries precisely because they first built their domestic economies, and then protected them against imports as long as necessary, liberalising at their own pace and on their own terms. By hailing East Asia's development strategy as a model for African countries to follow, Short therefore unknowingly advocates a path very different from the path of globalisation – and ironically, one that is now prohibited by World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, which aim to prise open markets as fast as possible.

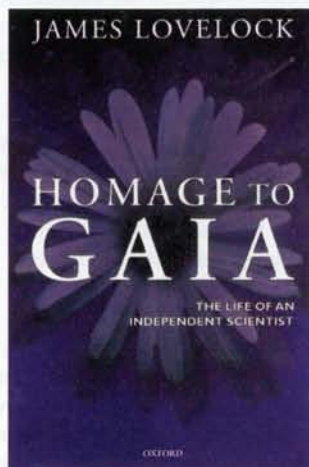
The government's promotion of the WTO's free trade dogma is underlined by its unquestioning belief that increasing exports means increasing prosperity – the White Paper enthusiastically recommends that African countries redouble their efforts to use their abundant land to grow agricultural goods for world markets. But, contrary to Short's claims, it is not only 'greens' in the North who contest this strategy. There are a great many networks of grassroots Southern critics who object to the contortion of their economies to provide ever more exports to the West. As the Chilean environmentalist Sara Larrain has exasperatedly complained: 'Why is it that people from the North think exports benefit us? They are wrecking our environment and increasing inequality.'

A growing number of people are recognising that we need a very different approach, which is increasingly becoming known as localisation – the strengthening and protection of local economies and communities both North and South. Trade was initially a search for the novel: Europeans went to India for spices and other exotics, not coal. This is the approach implied by 'localisation'; international trade without disastrous social effects, with long-distance trade gradually being used only for acquiring what cannot be provided within the region. If Clare Short's vision for the future for Africa is one in which ever more people are involved in exporting ever greater quantities of mangetout and cut flowers to the West, as this White Paper suggests, then it only shows how desperately we all need a substantial discussion about the genuine alternatives to globalisation.

Caroline Lucas, MEP

## HOMAGE TO GAIA

By James Lovelock  
OUP 2000 £19.99



There aren't many books that show what it's like to grow up in Dickensian squalor; to see all the rivets on Dr Strangelove's first creation, the V1 bomb, as it flies past; to bring nearly frozen hamsters back to life; and to make one of the most valuable, life-affirming discoveries of the 20th century. But that's what James Lovelock does in this sprawling intellectual and personal autobiography, which he modestly describes as a 'memory dump'.

Lovelock is among the most important contributors to the Western scientific tradition in the last hundred years. His most famous idea is the Gaia hypothesis, which holds that living organisms and non-life

together form a coupled system in which life creates conditions that favour it. The hypothesis has been exceptionally fertile in facilitating important discoveries about Earth systems (not least in understanding and modelling climate change), and in undermining the wilder claims of neo-Darwinism. It has also enriched all our capacities to wonder about the very nature of life, consciousness and the non-human world.

Among Lovelock's important inventions was his Electron Capture Detector, or ECD. This device, which he 'stumbled upon' in 1957, is so sensitive that, from the other side of the planet, it can detect a few parts per trillion of pollutant gases released into the atmosphere. The ECD played an important role in inspiring the modern environmental movement because it showed that tiny traces of dangerous pollutants don't just disappear but can spread through every part of the web of life. The story is Lovelock in a nutshell – brilliant, socially-useful science on a shoestring.

This should not be a first book for lay readers who want to understand the hypothesis and its implications. Better to read Lovelock's earlier volumes *Gaia – A New Look at Life on Earth* and *The Ages of Gaia* or an introduction such as *Gaia's Body* by Tyler Volk. There's also a first rate exploration of some of the philosophical and ethical implications of Gaia, Mary Midgely's new pamphlet published by Demos. But this is a great read if you want to understand the man and the genesis of his work.

So who is Lovelock? A Brixton lad who

thinks he could be a quarter Jewish. A lapsed Quaker. The member of a very rare blood group most often found among Inuits of northern Canada. Such labels don't really help. If anything, Lovelock has lived some of the virtues that in his younger days (and a more chauvinistic time) were idealised in the best type of Englishman: inventive and extremely practical; unsentimental and yet deep feeling; distrustful of authority and pomposity; and passionately committed to public service, fair play and respect for all people.

*Homage to Gaia* also illustrates points on which Lovelock differs from many contemporary environmentalists. His relative lack of suspicion of large corporations does not mean he endorses unbridled turbo-capitalism.

But some readers will see it as naivety. His support for nuclear power is founded on a belief that there is no alternative that will deliver the energy requirements for decent development for all the world's people at the same time as reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

On nuclear power, this reviewer would argue that Lovelock is wrong. Developments in renewable energy technologies (especially in the last 10 years or so) and the potential for quantum jumps in energy efficiency, offer enormous promise that is only starting to be harnessed. But, to ensure these alternatives deliver, a crucial factor will be more of precisely the kind of ingenuity and brilliance that Lovelock has demonstrated throughout his life.

Caspar Henderson

## WORTH SEEING

**A**rt and the environment don't have an easy relationship these days. Nature, once a primary inspiration, has fallen out of favour.

Think of recent Turner Prize winners, or the contents of the Saatchi gallery. The nearest you'll come to nature in the raw here is the inside of Damien Hirst's cow. In the minds of today's generation of ironic young things, urban is all. If they ain't talking about it in the Met Bar, it just ain't worth producing a looping video installation about. And that means it quite simply ain't art.

**S**till, there are a few blades of grass peeking through the postmodern pavement. The refreshingly irony-free Carolyn Stubbs, an 'environmental artist', is currently hosting an exhibition called 'Yesterday, Today, The Future...' on the Gatley Gallery 'virtual gallery' website ([www.gatleygallery.co.uk](http://www.gatleygallery.co.uk)).

Her three montages around the theme of humanity's relationship to the environment took her nearly three years to complete, and received over 800 visitors when they were recently exhibited in Bristol.



**M**eanwhile, if you want a reminder of the way art used to be, you've got until 11 February to get yourself down to the excellent **William Blake exhibition** at London's **Tate Britain** gallery (left). Much has been written about this elsewhere, so suffice to say that Blake was a visionary romantic whose relationship to Nature and, according to him, the Divine, is everywhere apparent in his paintings and poetry. Another artist who was scorned in his own time, and is celebrated today, is **J M W Turner**; an exhibition of his rarely seen watercolours runs at London's **Royal Academy**, also until 11 February. Go along and experience the work of a man who was unparalleled in his elemental depiction of landscapes.

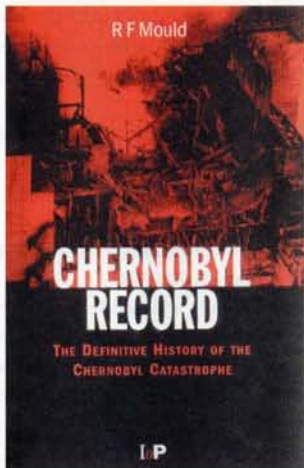
**F**inally, a plea: *The Ecologist* wants to hear as much as it can about any artists, exhibitions, galleries or websites which seek to celebrate, examine or resurrect the age-old relationship between art and nature. Send anything you know to me at the editorial office.

Paul Kingsnorth

# CHERNOBYL RECORD

## THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF THE CHERNOBYL CATASTROPHE

By R F Mould  
INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS  
PUBLISHING 2000 £7.95



It is almost 15 years since the No 4 reactor at Chernobyl exploded. In this 'information age', you might be forgiven for thinking that the cause and the consequences had been well described. You would be wrong. Dr R F Mould's *Chernobyl Record*, despite its 14 years of research, 400 glossy pages, eight colour plates and hundreds of tables, maps, diagrams and analyses, amounts to a pro-nuclear-industry talking-down of the dangers of nuclear power and the consequences of the accident.

Dr Mould, who is described as an 'internationally known author, medical physicist and cancer statistics specialist', introduces his 'Definitive History' with the following: 'What I have borne in mind throughout the research for this book have been the words of Thomas Gradgrind in the Charles Dickens novel, *Hard Times*: "Now what I want to hear is Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life."'

The book is certainly not short of facts: it is brim-full of interesting, useful, curious facts – and also incorrect facts, spun facts, and facts from which false conclusions are drawn. These facts are marshalled to produce the opposite of the truth. What are the important questions? How did the accident happen? How many people will die as a result? Could it happen here?

Dr Mould's arguments, and his ordering and choice of facts, answer these questions implicitly. The explosion, we are told (incorrectly) was not a nuclear explosion but a 'steam explosion' (like a kettle?). The radioactive contamination doses are mostly

less than natural background levels (and therefore safe) and the cancer yield, except for thyroid cancer in the most affected populations close to the plant, are too small to measure. Reported increases in non-cancer (and even cancer) illnesses are apparently due to better ascertainment, or even 'radiation phobia'.

So, business as usual for the nukes. In Chapter 18, Mould carries this argument beyond reason. As part of his thesis that there has been no cancer increase due to the accident, he compares cancer rates between 1988 and 1992 in Belarus with (curiously) Hiroshima. For lymphoid leukaemia, his table shows 2600 cases in a Belarussian population of 10,187,261; a crude annual rate of 5.1 per 100,000. For Hiroshima, there were 71 cases in a population of 1,065,946; a crude rate of 1.33. Is this meant to reassure?

The real facts are very different. To quote Professor Vladimir Nestorenko, member of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus (now threatened with legal proceedings for attempting to measure radiation levels in the area): 'In the period 1988 to 1995 the [childhood] tumours rate has grown by 2.4 times, the rate of malignant tumours by 13 times, endocrine [sic] system diseases rate by 4.5 times, illnesses of nervous system and organs of sense by 3.5 times, illnesses of blood circulation organs by 4 times.'

Such information, and data from cancer registries from Poland and Bulgaria to Wales show that the overall cancer yield of the accident will be much greater than the 970,000 cases calculated using the 'accepted risk factors' for radiation. The evidence suggests that ultimately more than 20 million people worldwide will contract cancer as a direct result of the Chernobyl disaster. And those who contemplate restarting the nuclear power project should note that the normal operation of 100 nuclear power stations over a planned 25 year lifespan, discharges the equivalent of four Chernobyl accidents to the biosphere.

We are left with two entirely antithetical pictures of the aftermath of Chernobyl: the pro-nuclear description, presented by Dr Mould and friends, and the real one. It is the old story. Those with the power and the money control the discourse. They fund the studies that show that there are no effects. They fund the production of books that give us the 'facts'. Dr Mould seems entirely to have missed the point of Thomas Gradgrind, his unfortunate role model. He was not a hero: Dickens intended him as an example of the absurdity of scientific reductionism. As

Dickens knew, facts themselves mean little without context or interpretation.

By all means buy this book, and marvel at its contents, study it as a masterpiece of 'factual description', of the mindset of the nuclear industry and its advocates. And although the book is not the immodestly styled 'definitive history', it certainly contains very interesting material, including a translation of the 'Legasov testament', the account of the accident and its causes by Valery Legasov, Deputy Director of the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, who later contracted leukaemia and committed suicide.

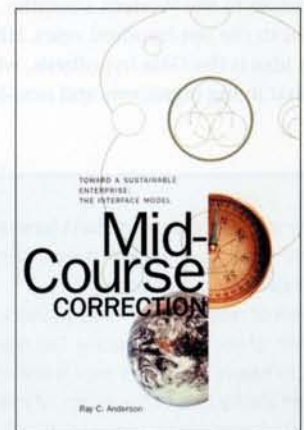
But I leave the last word to Alla Yaroshinskaya, the Russian journalist: 'The most dangerous isotope to escape from the bleeding mouth of the reactor will never appear on the periodic chemistry scale. It is Lie-86. A lie as global as the accident itself.'

Chris Busby

## MID-COURSE CORRECTION

### TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISE

By Ray C Anderson  
CHELSEA GREEN PUBLISHING 2000  
\$17.95



When Henry Ford launched his Model T motorcar, he stipulated that all parts from sub-contractors must be shipped to his Detroit assembly plant in wooden crates which were required to meet certain specifications as to size and sturdiness. These crates were subsequently used to make the floor-boards of the 'Tin Lizzy'. This early example of industrial recycling was no doubt motivated by a desire to maximise profits, rather than to minimise the ecological impact of the manufacturing process.

Some four-score years later, another

captain of industry – or ‘plunderer of the Earth’, as he labels himself with self-deprecating humour – has duplicated the Ford formula, but on a much larger scale and to a much nobler end: minimising the ecological impact of his company’s activities. For Ray Anderson, author of *Mid-Course Correction*, is also founder and chairman of Interface, the world’s largest maker of commercial carpeting, with factories in 34 countries, annual sales well over \$1 billion, and rated by *Fortune* magazine as one of the best 100 US companies to work for.

Being a belated convert to conservation – hence the title of his book – the author gives a heart-warming account of his own ‘epiphany’ in 1994, when he came to the personal realisation that we cannot continue depleting the planet’s finite resources and polluting our own biosphere ad infinitum. The fact that he was by then a grandfather of five may well have contributed to his conversion.

His environmental philosophy could be summed up in the slogan of the President’s Council on Sustainable Development, of

which he was appointed co-chair in 1997: ‘If we all do a little, we can do a lot’. It is what the author calls ‘The Power of One’. And this power has been put to good use, not just in his own company, which succeeded in cutting waste and pollution by some 25 per cent in the first three years after implementation of the new sustainability programme, (while saving millions of dollars in the process), but also by his legion of suppliers and customers around the world. Collectively, he says, ‘the thousands of little, environmentally sensitive things [that each one of us can do] are just as important as the five big technologies of the future: solar energy, closed loop recycling, zero waste, harmless emissions, and resource-efficient transportation.’

To emphasise the need for prompt and decisive action to create a sustainable world economy, Anderson posits compressing the geological life span of our planet – 750 million years – into the Bible’s six days of creation. By this reckoning, the industrial revolution took place one fortieth of a second ago, and it makes little difference whether our reserves of petroleum and other

raw materials are sufficient to last another 50 or 500 years – either figure is just a blink of an eye on the geophysical time scale. Our problem is that we are accustomed to measuring time relative to our own ‘puny time on Earth’ – a blip on the cosmic computer screen.

The author also debunks the myth perpetuated by many religions that ‘the Earth was made for man to conquer and rule’. Instead he sets forth some guidelines for developing a new industrial system, based on a paradigm which acknowledges, among other points, that the Earth’s resources are finite, the diversity of nature is crucial to the whole web of life, and that technology must become part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

One thing is certain: Anderson’s writing cannot be dismissed as the ramblings of some environmental alarmist. Instead, one can only hope that *Mid-Course Correction* may serve as an inspiration and course of action for other business executives. Its author has proved that it is, indeed, possible to ‘do well by doing good’.

Gard Binney

WORTH READING

Indian campaigner **Vandana Shiva** is always good value; her ‘Third World’ perspective on the absurdities of global trade, the marginalisation of the rural classes and the grinding down of diversity is always a good answer to the Clare Shorts of this world (‘why can’t you middle class greens stop denying the wonders of free trade to the desperate poor?’ etc). Shiva’s latest book **Stolen Harvest** (Zed Books; ISBN 1 84277 024 1) charts the disastrous impacts of globalised agriculture on the poor, small farmers and the environment.

Another new Zed Books title which could be read as a companion volume is **John Madeley’s Hungry For Trade – how the poor pay for free trade**. (ISBN 1 85649 865 4).

Eye-opening reads, both.

Since we’re talking globally, Verso’s recent **5 Days That Shook The World – the Battle for Seattle and beyond**, by **Alexander Cockburn** and others (ISBN 1 85984 779 X), might be worth a peek if you’re interested in the emerging new politics of anti-corporatism. It aims to put Seattle, Prague and the rest in context – claiming they will be seen to be as significant in time as the Vietnam protests of the 60s.

If you want something decidedly calmer and more local, though, the excellent little British charity **Common Ground** ([www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk)) have recently published their **Book of Orchards** (ISBN 1 870364 21 X). Beautifully illustrated, it’s a fascinating history of orchards, apples and all things connected with them; like everything else Common Ground do, it tries, and succeeds in, reinforcing a sense of the local and the link between nature and culture. Incidentally, their website features some great new posters by various artists promoting local diversity and attacking the consumer monoculture. Wonderful stuff.

In a practical note, meanwhile, here are a couple of books that might come in useful from day to day. **The Little Earth Book** by **James Bruges** (Alastair Sawday publishing; ISBN 1 901970 23 X) seems to be the green equivalent of one of those ‘Little books of...’ that you see on the counters at big book shops. But much more useful. It’s a pocket-sized compendium of the world’s key environmental and social justice issues, entertainingly presented. It’s packed with facts, history, nice illustrations and a bit of humour. US readers yearning for a car-free lifestyle might also want to pick up **Divorce Your Car** by **Katie Alvord** (New Society publishers – ISBN 0 86571 408 8) which is full of practical ways to help you do just that.

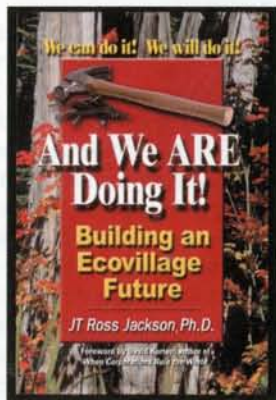
Finally, it would be a shame to close without tipping a wink to the latest pamphlet from radical cartoonist **Kate Evans**. She’s moved on from road protests and GM crops, and now she’s on climate change. Her new pamphlet contains the usual dose of idiosyncratic campaigning humour, with a perspective you won’t get from the mainstream. Ideal for handing out outside BP shareholders meetings. Get some copies by emailing [cartoonkate@bigfoot.com](mailto:cartoonkate@bigfoot.com).



Paul Kingsnorth

## AND WE ARE DOING IT BUILDING AN ECOVILLAGE FUTURE

By J T Ross Jackson  
RDR PUBLISHERS 2000 \$9.95



Don't be deceived; *And We ARE doing It!* is not a manual on yurt building, or a kitchen garden planner for alkaline soils. This is the tale of a modern-day Robin Hood, financial guru Ross Jackson, who mastered the business world for the good of the planet.

In 1988 Jackson set up Gaiacorp, a fund management company that trades on the international currency market to enormous profit. Within three years, Gaiacorp was worth £20 million. Unbeknown to its clients, however, Gaiacorp also had a sister company; a rather expensive relative called Gaia Trust, which creamed off 10 per cent of its big brother's profits to support sustainable communities. Determined to make a real difference, Jackson wanted Gaia Trust to support the people who were already building a 'green' future. For Jackson, these people were the 'ecovillagers', people who, for spiritual, social or environmental reasons, didn't believe in the system and, by building an alternative community, were actually doing something about it.

So what drove Jackson to support the ecovillagers? When he left Cleveland for Denmark in his early 20s, the first thing he noticed was the litter-free streets. In Denmark, people really seemed to care about their environment. Then he married a 'grass-roots activist with quasi-Marxist leanings', and his fate was sealed. Soon he was living a double life: consorting with transnational corporations in the office and experimenting with progressive co-housing projects at home.

Jackson realised that the world's favoured business model was out of date. The Earth has too many mouths to feed to support unlimited economic growth. He also realised that protectionism, anathema to a free-trade economy, is no bad thing. For in truth, present-day business hasn't done away with

protectionism at all. It simply favours one form of protectionism over another; the protection of elite corporate 'shareholders' over society at large. Worse still, Jackson realised, not only are corporations protecting their shareholders at other people's expense, they are also burdening the public with their costs. As he writes, if corporations were forced to internalise the true costs of their products – the health bills, the road repairs, the non-biodegradable products cluttering up our landfills – many of them would be forced off the shelves. 'We are like the passengers on the "unsinkable" Titanic sailing into a sea of icebergs while dancing on the deck', he says.

*And We ARE doing It!* is both a confident, well-informed overview of our economic climate, and an amusing autobiography. Although it may not teach you how to build a yurt, you might learn a thing or two about finance.

Lucinda Labes

## PLANET EARTH: THE LATEST WEAPON OF WAR A CRITICAL STUDY INTO THE MILITARY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

By Dr Rosalie Bertell  
THE WOMEN'S PRESS 2000 £12.99



Rosalie Bertell believes, as have many greens before her, that the current focus on economics is at the expense of ecology and the social environment. In *Planet Earth*, this internationally-respected scientist states that the most urgent problem facing humanity now is how to sustain Earth, our life-support system. To do this, we must find a new model of global living, not based on military force in support of a hard, unbending capitalism. This book is a vital contribution to the search for new solutions and means to create change. And she sees signs of hope in new social movements springing up around the world.

She begins with a detailed and devastating analysis of the wars of the last 10 years of the 20th century. In Part II, she provides an acute scientific basis for the madness of war and the destruction that science harnessed to the military is planning for us and our world. She discusses so-called natural disasters that are linked to human-caused climate change, the 'down-to-earth problems with Star Wars', and the environmental crises spawned by war-making, including pollution caused by depleted uranium and chlorine-based herbicides. She examines the economic fallacy of the military providing jobs and prosperity. There is detail and fact here enough to convince any concerned citizen, particularly those who see saving the environment as a separate struggle, that the work of peace, economic justice and ecology are one.

In the chapter 'Rethinking Security', Bertell brings it all together. She says that 'global consumption of resources is exceeding Earth's restorative capacity by at least 33 per cent. War and the preparations for war drastically reduce the store of these resources still further, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle in which competition for raw materials leads to further conflict.'

In order to redress this crisis she says we must tackle the question of security. We need to challenge the belief of many that military force is a 'necessary evil'. This new concept embraces a vision of social justice, human rights and the health of the environment. Security will be achieved through the protection and responsible stewardship of the Earth.

Bertell calls this 'ecological security', based on a complex multi-faceted approach to the world's problems. Realising this vision is a big job and requires multi-faceted solutions.

Dr. Bertell has many insights and ideas on how to create such solutions. She cites the need to alter the core belief of military security. Change always follows a challenge to core belief. Consider the examples of civil rights, women's rights, gay rights and the new challenges in the work of child's rights, child soldiers and animal rights.

This book is full of examples and ideas. It is a book to hold on to, for repeated reference to information and inspiration. In her own words, 'It is my hope that this book will open up for the reader an historical matrix against which to view the present and future... I also hope it will spur the reader to become involved in peaceful enterprises. We must set up a cooperative relationship with the Earth, not one of dominance.' She says that in spite of years of abuse, Earth is still an amazing and beautiful creation. 'It deserves our best efforts. Enjoy it, love it and save it!'

Theresa Wolfwood

## Page 32 *Organicised crime*

- 1 see [www.foodstandards.gov.uk](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk)
- 2 Interview with Sir John Krebs on BBC's Country File, 3 August, 2000
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- 5 see [www.nfbg.org.uk](http://www.nfbg.org.uk)
- 6 Man in the Eye, *Private Eye*, No.994, 28 January, 2000.
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## CROSSING THE CREEK TO FETCH WATER

The case for localised food production.

Reading the report 'Bringing the Food Economy Home', compiled by the International Society for Ecology and Culture [ISEC] and reviewed in the November 2000 issue of *The Ecologist*, started me thinking — a painful but sometimes productive activity. It reminded me of an old Swedish saw denoting extreme folly or profligate waste: *Crossing the creek to fetch water*, a phrase which concisely sums up what is wrong with the concept of globalised food production. At the risk of preaching to the choir, I'd like to comment on the topic — strictly from a personal and parochial point of view.

It so happens that I reside in a small seaside town in Florida, which used to be known as the Tomato Capital of the United States. Under the pressure of a heavy influx of people into the Sunshine State — Florida's population has quadrupled since World War II — the tomato fields have long since given way to more profitable usage, notably the building of condominiums and shopping malls. By coincidence, my flat is housed in a complex of buildings sitting smack in the middle of what was once a fertile tomato field — until such localised food production was deemed unprofitable. Now when I want to sink my teeth into the fruit of the *tomatl* plant (once native only to South America), I can choose among tomatoes from a variety of locales, including California, Canada, Holland, and the Canary Islands — all quite expensive, but none that can hold a candle to the sun-ripened tomatoes of my childhood.

Inspired by the ISEC report, I decided to check its validity relative to my own personal situation.

Herewith the result of my findings, for whatever they are worth:

In the course of my efforts at emulating Escoffier, I purchase a variety of veggies at the local supermarket. As most of these are grown in California, and I live on the opposite side of the continent, the legumes must travel a long distance — not as the Crow flies, but as the Leviathan lorries lumber along the highways of the USA. To take just one example, California's annual production of four popular vegetables (asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower, and celery) destined for shipment to other states totals some 2 million tons. According to the American Trucking Association, the distance these veggies are transported averages 2,000 miles, most of them shipped in semis with a loading capacity of 30 tons

and a fuel consumption averaging 7.5 mpg. This adds up to roughly 70,000 truckloads a year, burning up some 20 million gallons of fuel, one fourth of which represents a complete waste of a non-renewable resource, as a quarter of the produce is spoiled or otherwise discarded on arrival at its final destination.

As crazy as this may seem to an unsophisticated observer, all this profligate activity is counted as a plus in computing the gross national product, or GNP. As ISEC's report explains in the chapter on Food and the Economy: 'If all hidden subsidies were removed, and all external costs incorporated into the price... it would quickly become obvious how much [cheaper] locally produced... foods really are.'

'The immense cost of shipping foods long distance... is not paid by the producer or consumer, but by society as a whole.'

What is remarkable about this accounting sleight-of-hand — the equivalent of entering an obligation as an asset in a book-keeping ledger — is that it is largely ignored by politicians, whose vision of the future only extends to the next election, and even by

**'Tomato fields have long since given way to the building of condominiums and shopping malls.'**

some Nobel laureate economists. But the Swedish inventor of dynamite would probably have exploded in anger, had he known that the committee named for him would one day establish a prize for such an imprecise 'science' as economics.

Added to the cost of long-distance hauling of agricultural products is the problem of ozone-depleting pollution and global warming. It is estimated that in the US interstate food transport releases 120 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere annually, and for each degree Celsius (another Swede!) that the temperature rises, the oceans will rise one foot due to massive meltdown of the polar ice caps. For the millions of people living near sea level this does not bode well: at the rate global warming is proceeding, the number of people affected by coastal flooding will increase from 5 to 200 million by the year 2080.

Our hope for deliverance from such a fate depends on our willingness to heed the warnings voiced by organisations like ISEC. Its founder, Helena Norberg-Hodge, has obviously taken to heart the wisdom of her native Sweden; she has devoted her life to spreading the message throughout the world that 'crossing the creek to fetch water' just does not make sense, (whether in an ecological or cultural context). And her work is finally bearing fruit, as witness the many organic farms and local produce markets springing up all over the map.

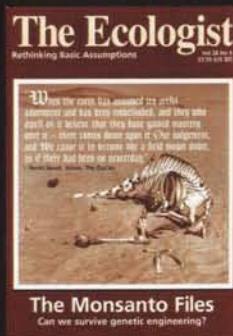
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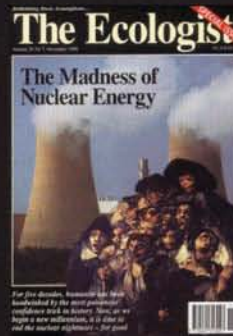
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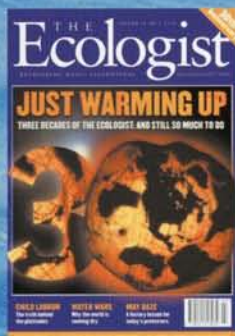
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