

AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY

With regard to the global neoliberal economy, the problem is not that there are no alternatives to this ideology. Many authors have described such alternative economies, starting with the Club of Rome's, *The Limits to Growth* (1972) and its many follow-up publications and Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973). Since that time there have been numerous publications spelling out in detail what an alternative economy would look like. Different authors have used such word as: 'a no growth economy', 'an economics of enough', 'a sustainable economy', 'a non-profit economy', 'a circular economy', 'a de-growth economy', 'a subsistence economy', 'an ecological economy', 'climate change economics', 'community economic development', a 'just economy', 'economics as applied ethics', etc. As I wrote in *The Gods in Whom They Trusted*, (2016), "we need an inter-related economic system that does justice to all aspects of life" p. 461, (cf. pp. 509, 524, 570, 578, 738, 744 and the many examples in chapter 11).

Polanyi (1977, 2001) talks about the "social embeddedness of the market". An integral or holistic economy takes into account and does justice to all aspects of life: public transportation, public housing, public water, garbage and utility services, living spaces, parks, conservation areas, community development, places of worship, social services, recreational facilities, public safety, hospitals, schools, libraries, museums, cooperatives, credit unions, people's physical and emotional well-being, as well as providing for the basic necessities of life. These are all the aspects that enhance the well-being of people and communities. Within such an integrated economic development there is no place for austerity programs, which usually means more tax cuts and subsidies for corporations and businesses and cut-backs to education, health and social services, the arts, etc. Such a non-profit economy will be guided by a vision of the multi-dimensional unity of life and the built-in guide posts inherent in our experience (an experiential ethics). In such provisioning, any 'surplus' will be used for further development, sharing and unfolding of each dimension of life.

Such a change to a multi-dimensional and inter-related view of life requires a radical transformation from a one-dimensional view of the economy and life. Initially, during the Enlightenment, material and scientific progress was inseparably connected to ethical and social progress. That means we live in a society, not in an economy as the nightly newscasts would have us believe. Neo-liberalism is a perversion and betrayal of the Enlightenment ideals and traditional Humanistic and liberal values. Economics is not a neutral, scientific study, but a normative science. If it is not normative it can't be humanized and there is no accountability.

These norms are embedded in the fabric of life and call us to respond. They are a 'given' and an 'ought'. We only need to actualize or give form to them, each generation anew.

Of equal importance are the numerous local and regional examples of people providing for their needs in an integrated and communal way. These efforts are characterized by horizontal relationships and organization (instead of hierarchical structures), self-governing, cooperative, egalitarian, participatory, inclusive, sharing, ecologically sustainable, serving all aspects of the community and mutual caring. Intuitively or quite consciously they have put into practice the experiential guideline or norm for 'making a living' by providing equally for all the needs of their communities.

There are hundreds of alternative organizations in Canada alone that speak for and promote such economic developments that are in harmony with all of life, like the David Suzuki Foundation, the Council of Canadians, National Farmers Union, Green Party of Canada, Eco Justice, Mining Watch, Friends of the Earth, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Sierra Club Canada, Satisfying Justice, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Eco Forestry, Fair Vote Canada, Transition Towns, Green Communities Canada (see Collingwood as an example), and numerous other ones.

The fundamental problem is *not a lack of alternative visions* for economic development and practices, *nor a lack of concrete examples*. In the end it is a lack of opportunity to put these visions into practice on a *national and international level*. Wherever people have tried, particularly in South and Central America, they have been consistently opposed by the corporate and political elite, promoted by the media and enforced or brutally put down by the police and army. Labour organizations, Liberation Theology adherents and priests, artists and writers, peasant organization like Via Campesina, all have courageously opposed this neoliberal domination. Every year in the global south hundreds of community leaders, subsistence farmers, indigenous people, peaceful protesters, including women and children are killed, imprisoned, or terrorized. Canadian mining companies and government representatives have consistently exploited these internal liberation struggles and joined forces with corrupt governments.

In Canada, implementing another economic vision is blocked by corporate power structures and influence (lobbyists, media control, political donations, public relations people, think tanks, industry advisors, etc.). Corporate leaders and politicians are equally committed to the neoliberal ideology as an ultimate conviction and driving force of life. In this view, greed and self-interest are turned into a virtue. 'Conservative Tories' and 'Red Tories' (Harper and Trudeau) are both in the service of this religious ideology. They may use a different vocabulary, but their policies are basically the same. When in power New Democrats find an uneasy and

often compromising place within these power structures. The underrepresented Green Party tends to be an exception, as is evident from their political platform and weekly report from Elizabeth May. Their basic values and policies represent a different economic and societal vision. In the end no political party is the perfect embodiment of the norm for governing that is, *doing justice*, enabling all creatures, including humans, to find their rightful place under the sun. However, it makes all the difference what fundamental direction a party is committed to in spite of shortcomings and mistakes.

Proportional representation seems to be the only *national* instrument that could change the Canadian political landscape. However, such a move to a fair voting system will continue to be opposed by the vested interests, as happened recently with Justin Trudeau. Maybe British Columbia will be the first province to introduce such a different voting system. On a *national* level it is the most important change that could give more radical alternative policies and practices a voice and an opportunity for implementation. If all the alternative groups we mentioned above were unified in a loose federation guided by a small number of principles, like the Via Campesina, the Canadian political scene would change dramatically. Unified, they could find a political outlet through the Green Party, or some newly emerging parties. Together hundreds of alternative organizations and efforts represent an unacknowledged vocal and active majority. There would still be an ideological struggle - the neoliberal religion will not go down quietly – but it would be transferred to the national level. It would no longer be hidden away from public view and scrutiny.

What is at stake are not some abstract political or economic ideas, but the survival of our environment, including the human species. In spite of many mitigation measures, it is still business-as-usual with its increasing disintegrative effects on land, water, air and society. It is widely acknowledged that Canada will not meet its commitment to CO₂ reductions during the coming decades. Never mind reducing all the other aspects that contribute to global warming and climate change. We are not talking about some relative differences of political opinions that we need to respect. We are talking about an ultimate conviction that is destructive to life. It concerns the future of our children and our grand children.

What is at stake is the increasing acidification and pollution of our oceans; the depletion of our top soils; the chemical pollution of our drinking water and food; the decline of biodiversity and extinction of many species; the increase in super bugs and invasive plants; the warming of our atmosphere; severe weather events; rising sea levels; a decreasing supply of fresh water; climate, water and food refugees; increasing mega cities and rural decline; suburban sprawl; land and water grabbing; destruction of countless ecosystems; increase in mining and mineral exploration; on-going de-forestation; expanding deserts; over-fishing; diminishing and near

extinction of major fish species; melting glaciers and perma frost; the on-going yearly subsidies to the fossil fuel industry (Canada: 12 billion; USA: 20 billion; G20: 62 billion; Canada: less than 200 million for clean energy); and much more.

The 'scathing' reports, written in polite language, by the Commissioners of the Environment and Sustainable Development about chemical pollution and its effect on drinking water, food and human health (2003, 2008, 2015) and lack of climate change adaptation measures, failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and phase out fossil fuel subsidies (2017); these reports and many others contain a clear message. Various governments of whatever stripe are deeply committed to the neoliberal conviction about life. Commissioners, both provincial and federal, can only chip away at underfunded, reluctant government departments' lack of action and progress. The commissioners are the official watchdogs on behalf of all citizens. Whatever issues they examine, it is evident that it is often a painful exercise.

Meanwhile, we need to continue and hold steady in opposing local gravel pits, dumping (contaminated) soil and sludge, corporate water taking, on-going chemical contamination of our water, soil, and air, chemical threats to our food and health, sub-urban sprawl, etc. Instead we need to support locally grown food, improved transportation systems, better health services, public housing, protection of our parks and conservation areas, and so on. We can promote all the things that are life-enhancing and not life-destroying. Whether we can stop the present disintegration and decline or not, we need to hold steady and trust that the built-in signposts endure and will continue to show us the way. Conviction, trust, surrender is all that we have left at times, but they are the most powerful attributes we can rely on, no matter what...

References: See the Bibliography on 'Capitalism and the Economy' p.883-897 in *The Gods in Whom They Trusted* by Arnold De Graaff

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