

In the hands of the few

EVERY COMMUNITY, FROM the lowliest farmstead to the greatest nation, is established on some resource which it can claim as its own. This relationship is layered from the world community down to the family and the smallest social groups. The community's wealth comes from this, and its wealth over what is needed for basic subsistence provides the means for culture and civilisation.

As a community develops it enriches itself and the environment into which the next generation is born. Community generates its own means.

But when an 'outside' agency takes part of the community's supporting surplus, it changes the community's relationships at large. Community comes to rely on that agency – whether a private landlord or colonial power. It becomes indebted and loses the ability to imagine itself without this crutch.

The relationship between the people individually and as a whole with the place they call home, is the nub. In this can be found a clue to many problems. The history of the modern world is the history of the natural symbiosis between individual, community and environment being overturned – whether it's the destroying of rain forests, the market corruption of US steel protectionism, or the British colonist taking ancestral lands.

In all these instances a critical extractive event has occurred. Sometimes the event is a one-off. In others it's on-going process. The Europeans only needed to come once for the lands of the American First Nations, whereas at home the landlord comes regularly for his tribute. Something which is the community's to rely on is taken and kept by someone else.

The resulting imbalance is a relationship of indebtedness. The cure is in the reclamation of resources, and applying them to the community that creates them.

Such indebtedness sees one person or company or institution imposing a flawed and unjust social and economic system. When this is accepted as normal, public life becomes privatised. Community becomes the 'property' of corporations and a new financing class – with the rest of us expected to be grateful for their assistance. "You'd like a new school? Well let us see what we can do, and if you just sign there on the dotted line..." The theft is loaned back to the victim with interest.

The question is how can the different groups of humanity develop the social infrastructure they want while minimising debt? How might the resource base of any human community be properly identified, managed, safeguarded and applied properly? How can the community chest enrich the community?

Democratic communities must identify and claim their resources, and apply the value of them to create development. Community should be funded from wealth derived from its common resources. In practical terms the annual rent of land captures the price of that wealth and should be shared and used democratically.

Individuals and communities are born indebted to no-one. That they become so is due to the faults of our human social systems, not forgetting the cruelty of us all in accepting and continuing with those systems. In nature there is no debt.

Will we free ourselves from the private landlords, mortgage lenders, loan sharks, IMF and credit card companies? Or will we forever be held by those able to extract the wealth of life and incarcerate the majority within an impoverished existence? It is they who hold the world's wealth in their hands and place a world of debt on all our heads.

Development can and must come without debt.

Peter Gibb

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Terrorism – do we create those willing to kill for their cause?