

From John McConnell's autobiography – pp 228-234

Earth Day

Vision for Peace, Justice, and Earth Care

My Life and Thought at Age 95

Wipf and Stock, 2011

22

Economics of Resources

PRINCIPLES FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

If we are going to have a healthy global economy, we must recognize three things. First, there is an equal claim of every person on our planet to Earth's land and raw materials. Any fair consideration of these rights will lead to some arrangement that will give each individual the title to an equitable portion of his planet, or compensation for its use by others. Earth Rights, or rights to an Earth Claim, is a basic necessity in building a healthy society.

Second, we must have a fair and stable medium of exchange, based on the commodities or properties to be exchanged, in the amounts needed to maintain a healthy flow of exchange. The system should encourage fair trade and payment of services, rewarding the workers instead of the drones – the manipulators and schemers seeking unearned profits.

If we are going to build a future, if we are going to shift from “Earth Kill” to “Earth Care,” then these two problems – equitable property shares and fair money – must be addressed. They can be solved. In fact we have some actions in mind that can be taken to correct these appalling inequities.

Third, we must solve the problem of nationalism.

In this chapter, I consider the first principle, of every person's claim on the planet. The problem of money is considered in the next chapter, Chapter 23. Finally, the problem of nationalism is considered in Chapter 24 on government.

THE BIG PICTURE

The only way to solve the problems of pollution, poverty and violence is to be objective and look at the total picture.

To this end, let us imagine that we are beings from another planet, looking at Earth's civilization for the first time. Here is a planet with land and raw materials – oil, minerals, gold, diamonds, a great variety of useful metals, chemicals, and amazing natural resources: oceans, forests, insects, and fish. And there are balanced air and ocean currents to help sustain life.

The visitors from space would also see that Earth's human civilization now has technology which, carefully used, could bring the real benefits enjoyed by the affluent few to all Earth's inhabitants.

This can be accomplished in ways that are just and fair. Earth Day (on Nature's March equinox) and the Earth Trustee Agenda provided by Earth Day point the way. To state this simply, we are one human family with a miracle home, called Planet Earth. We did not produce the planet, but whether considered a gift of God, or from an unknown source, reason tells us that all members of the human family have equal rights to its bounty and equal responsibility for its care.

RIGHTS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Most great wealth has been obtained by taking advantage of a corrupt economic system for personal advantage – without fair returns to those whose labor makes profit possible.

All over the world the working poor know something is wrong. To explain the problem and offer a solution, I wrote an Earth Magna Charta, which explains that to continue the human adventure we must think and act as Earth Trustees, seeking choices in economics, ethics and the care of the environment that would provide peace, justice and a sustainable future.

The idea that can best illuminate our understanding is recognition that we are all "Trustees of Earth." We each have equal rights and responsibilities in regard to our planet. Our task is to seek in ecology, economics and ethics the choices that will encourage initiative, eliminate poverty and pollution, and provide a sustainable future. There are two levels of effort needed. On the one hand, we must take emergency action to remedy problems using social structures as they presently exist. Many political and economic institutions are unfair and inefficient, but compromises are needed for emergency action. The hungry should be fed. The homeless housed. The worst case pollution addressed.

At the same time we must restructure socio-economic institutions – on a crash basis – to provide stable currency, free credit based on sound assets, methods of capital flow that maximize distribution of production's capabilities, "Earthfair" instead of welfare – not charity, but royalties to the disinherited poor from the God-created assets of our planet – oil, gold minerals, and other natural resources. The Bible says, "The Earth hath he given to the children of men." It's time for the disinherited poor to benefit from their inheritance as well as have opportunity for work.

People of all creeds and cultures make up the human family. We all have an equal claim to Earth's land, raw materials, and natural resources – and an equal responsibility for Earth's care. Every person should be reminded that he is a part owner of this Earth and has an equal right to Nature's bounty. He must be given access to his portion of Earth's raw materials and opportunities. It must be the goal of all countries to make available a minimum inheritance of natural resources to everyone. An individual's benefits will then depend on his ability and industry in the use of his birthright.

The wealth of the planet includes the unused natural resources that each generation inherits. It also includes the improvements resulting from human labor: factories, farms, homes, merchandise, oil wells and power plants presently in use.

Let me emphasize this point even further. The Earth is the inheritance of the whole human family. There is a sense in which each individual has an equal claim to Earth's raw materials and natural resources – not to the results of other people's labor, but to the natural bounty of Earth which makes work possible. Some means should be provided to assure each individual an opportunity to obtain a stake in their planet.

At present the ownership, control and use of land – the basic property essential for us all – is totally unfair to the majority of people.

PLANETARY INHERITANCE

At present the children of the wealthy inherit wealth, while the children of the poor inherit poverty. It is time that all children inherit the Earth – our common heritage.

Before proceeding further, I would like to mention an incident in a book called *The Far Pavilions*, by M. M. Kaye.¹ As a child, Akbar, the hero in this historical novel, was told by his father that much of the conflict, violence and war in the world would be eliminated if people would just learn to be fair with one another. We need to put ourselves in other people's shoes and really consider their point of view and circumstances. In the following I would like us to consider what would truly be fair.

Let's think globally. We have an amazing planet with a web of life that can provide a good life for all. But shortsighted greed and lack of understanding of what is fair has resulted in terrible poverty for most of the human race. This fact is used as an excuse for terrorism against the powerful.

There is no excuse for extreme poverty and unearned extreme wealth. New Earth Trustee economic policies can remedy this. There is growing support for a New Millennium Proposal to cancel the massive debts owed by the poorest countries. This should be followed by vigorous efforts to restructure economic institutions and achieve just and efficient production, trade and currency exchange.

In 1974, I wrote Sheikh Ahmed Yamani, Saudi Arabia's petroleum minister, proposing that 50 per cent of oil royalties be given to help the earth and its disinherited people. Ten percent of this should go to organizations feeding and housing the hungry and homeless. Another 10 percent would be for specific environmental programs to enrich the earth's natural resources. The larger portion, 30 percent, would be distributed equally and directly to all adults in any poor area of any community of the world. In allocating that 30 percent, each person would receive a share, as of stock, with periodic dividends, perhaps \$100 a year.²

Later that year in New York, Sheikh Yamani spoke at the United Nations. I was invited to meet with him. Sheikh Yamani told me that he had received my letter, and we discussed what I had written about planetary rights. In our conversation he said he was taken by my ideas and warmly agreed with me that the natural wealth of the world (land, oil, gold, and other resources) was the common property of the whole human family. And that we should find a way to implement these rights, which would foster economic justice all over the world. I was told that the benefit of the Saudi oil wealth was later shared with many countries in need.. But he did not fully implement the ideas. Had he done so, the world would be far better off today.

EARTH RIGHTS

What is needed is a totally new doctrine of property rights. Out of Earth Day and the ensuing thoughts about Earth People and Earth Care, I was led to new concepts of individual rights to the use of the Earth.

¹ M. M. Kaye, *The Far Pavilions*, St Martins Press, 1978.

² John Cuniff, "Founders Mission: Change World," *The Phoenix Gazette*, March 19, 1974.

Our planet is rich in raw materials – gold, oil, minerals, soil, water and biological wonders. Since God is no respecter of persons and provides equal justice, every individual on our planet has a claim to an equal benefit from his Earth-Rights inheritance. Moreover, every child on Earth has both an equal claim to natural resources and a responsibility to help take care of them. In the 1970 Earth Day, we used buttons that showed the Earth as seen from space and that said, “Our Inheritance, Our Responsibility.”

In the new age facing us we should recognize the need for equal human rights on a global scale. Each person who comes into this world should have a right to his share of our global unearned inheritance. Providence has placed on this planet enough land, water and other natural resources to provide, with proper development and use, a rich and happy life for every man, woman and child on Earth. Benefits provided by our planet should be enjoyed, not just by the few, but by everyone.

To pursue this end, a determination should be made of the total value of all the raw land and natural resources on Earth (apart from improvements or buildings). The result, divided among all the Earth’s population, would give the amount of each person’s rightful Planetary Inheritance.

To provide this inheritance, governments should assess the value of all real estate – less improvements, plus the value of any oil, gold or other minerals produced each year. It is important to note that improvements (such as houses and factories) are not included in this appraisal of the Earth’s value. Each person’s prosperity would be the result of the wise and efficient use he makes of his global inheritance. He does not have a right to what others have produced from their inheritance.

Two percent of this appraised Earth value should be distributed each year to every family on Earth. The money would come from a 2 percent tax paid by those who have title to these assets – which in a sense, belong to the whole human family. A 2 percent annual royalty on assets, paid by present owners, would provide the disinherited poor their needed purchasing power without the stigma of charity, and encourage responsibility in its use. While in many cases they would need help in learning how to use their inheritance wisely, there are altruistic individuals and institutions (churches, non-profit groups, etc.) that would gladly render this service. A just demand could then be met by a fair supply.

This would provide a fair, honest solution to the problem of poverty. People would still benefit most from their labor. But the child in a wealthy family would not be the only one to inherit unearned money. Everyone would have a minimum inheritance from our planet’s natural bounty. This would be accompanied by voluntary efforts to be responsible Trustees of Earth and help protect and nurture Earth’s amazing web of life. Each person would receive his portion in a form that would contribute most to his welfare, through provisions for education, training, agricultural facilities, purchase of a home, or a combination of all these. This would be each person’s stake, his opportunity, his inheritance.

In principle, nature has provided each man with about two acres of ground (or five acres of ocean fishing), containing an allotment of minerals, trees, flowers, and in the tropics, food. Now it is up to each man what he makes of it. Of course, to be practical we must think in terms of equivalent value and opportunity. In our complex society, not every man can have a two acre plot of ground, but he’s entitled to a place of his own and an

opportunity to make it a home. Not many would want to mine their share of copper or drill for their share of oil; but they do want and deserve opportunity for materials and facilities that enable them to benefit from some useful service. They want to enjoy the improvements they provide and pass them on to their children.

To extend this principle further, nations that have more than their share of natural resources – oil, minerals, *etc.* – would make available, at cost, the resources in excess of their share, to those nations who lack their share. This benefit should be extended to every nation that provides its citizens their planetary birthright. Further, people in overcrowded nations should have the opportunity to emigrate to lands with more room. Nations with friendly arrangements to help one another in the full development of their countries would bring great prosperity and a new, deeper justice in their relationships.

EARTH RIGHTS FUND

I again maintain that each Earth Person has an equal right to an equal share of Earth's raw materials and natural resources. Only as we find effective ways to implement this basic right can society achieve social justice for the whole Earth.

To this end I propose that an Earth Rights Fund be established that will provide each Earth Person in war-torn countries a new stake in his planet. Funded by private, corporate and government contributions and channeled through the United Nations, this fund would provide an initial demonstration project of Earth Rights for Earth People. And it would send a ray of hope to the down-trodden of every country, a promise that as we seek justice and work together, we all can inherit the Earth.

If the Earth Rights project can be quickly initiated and rapidly spread (via the Earth Signal; see chapter 27), the powers of the human heart will be tapped, the voice of reason will be heard, and a real and lasting peace will begin.