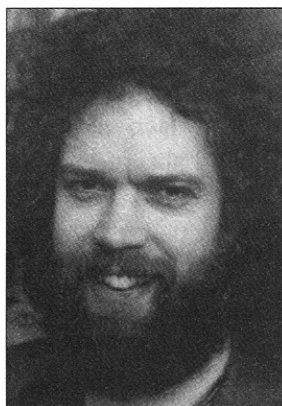


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# No More than a Fair Share of the Earth's Resources

**Eurig Scandrett, Scotland**



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Scandrett has worked in land use research and has over ten years experience in adult and community education.

He is a director of Scottish Education and Action for Development, and of the Centre for Human Ecology, as well as Treasurer of Democratic Left Scotland, a left-of-centre non-party political organisation which aims to redefine socialism, based on core values of democracy and equality.

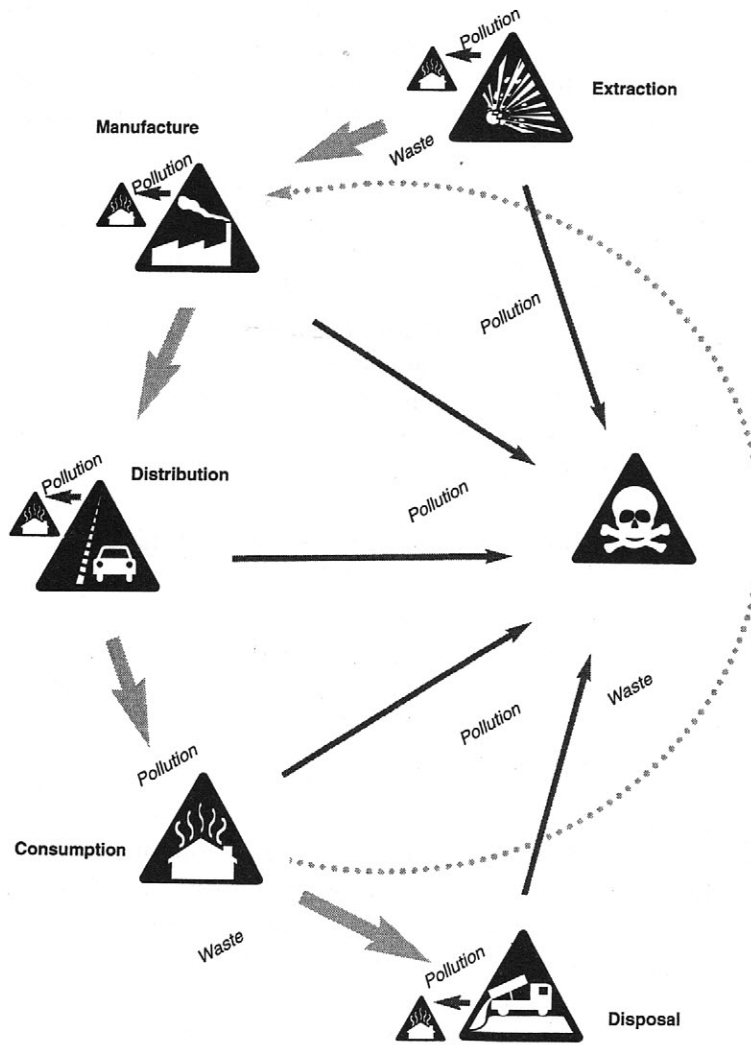
I start from a perspective towards land value taxation, rather as many people view art – I don't know much about it, but I know what I like. Or rather, I know what I don't like in the way in which the Earth's resources are used and the social implications of that. Resource taxation has been advocated as part of the solution, and what I'd like to do is to throw these problems out to those who advocate land value taxation, to see the extent to which LVT can address the over-consumption and unequal consumption of the Earth's resources.

I have been introduced as coming from Friends of the Earth Scotland and Democratic Left Scotland. FoE Scotland is an independent, Scottish, environmental NGO, which has LVT as a policy from many years ago. However, in practice we are largely politically pragmatic, in order to achieve our social and environmental aims, rather than adhering to a single solution. Democratic Left Scotland is a socialist organisation, operating in civil society, drawing on radical, feminist and green analyses and advocating a radical redistribution of power through alliances of progressive forces in society. Our interest in land reform originates from our interest in Andy Wightman's work, and we worked with him to produce his book *Scotland: Land and Power*.

The title of this talk comes from FoE Scotland's strapline about our primary campaign priority – environmental justice; that is “no less than a decent environment for all, with no more than our fair share of the Earth's resources”. Scotland's landscapes are well known for being attractive, but the land where many people live is devastated. Many people in Scotland live near to opencast mines, landfill sites, factories, incinerators and other damaged landscapes, and in a large part, the people that suffer the most are the poorest, most disenfranchised, socially or geographically isolated. The lack of a decent environment for many is one part of the environmental injustice which we attempt to tackle.

The cause of environmental damage is of course what economists call negative externalities, the unintended bad impacts of economic decision-making in the process of producing the “goods” which our society demands. Figure 1 shows the material flow in the economy: from extraction; to manufacturing and processing; to distribution; to consumption; to disposal at the end. This is obviously a highly simplified diagram, but the principle is accurate. At each of these stages there is a negative external effect, as the process involves waste, emissions, damage to land; and the whole process involves conversion of resources from their raw, natural state, into a hole in the ground (or incinerated, followed by filling the residue in the ground). Some of the

**Figure 1**  
**Environmental injustices are caused by the**  
**flow of resources through the economy**



Source: Friends of the Earth Scotland

external effects are local and the people who live beside these quarries, factories, roads etc tend to be the poorest communities, and suffer the damaging environmental effects. Other external effects of pollution are global in their impact, such as climate change arising from fossil fuel use.

In the particular case of Scotland, lying on the periphery of the European economic area, there is a greater demand for the extraction of natural resources for use in the developing economic core, stretching between London, Berlin and Turin. Thus you get arguments – such as those used in the Lingerbay Superquarry case, where developers seeking permission to remove a large chunk of Roineabhal, a mountain on the southernmost tip of the island of Harris – defending the extraction of aggregates in the “remote” parts of Europe for development in central parts.

So, if the economic processes which produce the goods we need, cause the conversion of resources into waste, and pollution and damage at a local and a global level, then the question is – does it have to be like that? Is it possible to use resources in a way and at a level which does not damage the environment? Before we look at how we can reduce our detrimental impact on the environment, we need to assess what we are aiming for, how much resource use and waste production the environment can absorb safely. Once we know the total amount of resource use which can be accommodated by the environment, then we can discuss how that amount should be distributed throughout the world.

Friends of the Earth, internationally, have used the concept of “environmental space” to describe this. The environmental space of any resource is that amount which can be used without causing environmental damage. For a scarce resource which is not renewable, then the most limiting factor will be the amount of resource which is available. For most resources however, the most limiting factor is the extent to which the waste stream can be absorbed safely by the environment. Moreover, the assumption of environmental space is that everyone has the same right of access to these natural resources. Thus environmental space is expressed in units per capita.

When the environmental space for various resources is calculated, then the “sustainability gap” or the difference between current resource use and the environmental space, can be calculated for any country. The environmental space, and the percentage decrease required for Scotland to achieve that level, is shown below for selected resources (taken from FoE Scotland's study *Towards a Sustainable Scotland* 1996). As can be

seen, a reduction of between 80 and 90% is required in most cases, if we are to use no more than our fair share of the Earth's resources.

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Environmental space (Kg/capita/year)</b>	<b>% decrease required</b>
Carbon (Fossil fuels)	1,700	80
Pig iron	36	87
Cement	80	85
Aluminium	1.2	90
Copper	0.75	88
Lead	0.39	83

A more common resource such as aggregate requires a reduction of only 50%. However, currently 90% of aggregate for construction comes from primary sources, i.e. quarries, whereas aggregate waste from demolition constitutes one third of all waste which goes to landfill. There are, moreover, 20 sites in Scotland which have been identified as suitable for superquarries such as Lingerbay.

Taking fossil fuel use, the most limiting factor is the capacity for the environment to absorb carbon dioxide emissions without climate disruption. The world's annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions approximate to 4.3 tonnes per capita (tpc), some two and a half times the environmental space of 1.7 tpc. The use of fossil fuels is, however, highly unequal: Scotland's emissions are approximately 8.7 tpc, whereas the African average is 1.0 tpc.

Christian Aid, the UK based world development charity, has estimated that the value to the economies of the richest countries (G7), of continuing to use fossil fuels at a higher level than would be a fair share, amounts to some US\$ 13 trillion. That is what the world's richest countries would lose if their fossil fuel use dropped to a level which didn't exploit the global atmosphere, without adapting their economies in terms of efficiencies and alternative sources of energy. In other words, the rest of the world is subsidising the G7 countries' lifestyle to the tune of \$13 trillion per year. The total external debt of the poor countries is \$1 trillion. From an ecological point of view, who is indebted to whom?

Having identified the extent to which we in the rich countries use more of our fair share of the Earth's resources, I want to finish with a couple of concerns about the ways in which their solution is being advocated. Various attempts to introduce resource taxation have been

introduced (although not, as yet, LVT) in order to meet some of the resource consumption challenges which we are faced with. In the UK, carbon taxes such as the fuel duty escalator and the climate levy have been introduced to shift taxation away from beneficial attributes, such as labour, to consumption. The aggregates tax has recently been introduced and the landfill tax is a form of land taxation graded by the degree to which the land is degraded.

This shift from direct to indirect taxation is part of the European policy approach of ecological modernisation, using market mechanisms rather than regulatory ones to control environmental damage. The problem of course with indirect taxation, as with all market led approaches, is that people don't start from a position of equality, thus it hits the poorest hardest, and favours the richest, often most profligate users. Resource taxation must be matched by a more progressive direct taxation in order to promote environmental justice.

Secondly, the main weakness of the Scottish Executive's land reform legislation is that, far from redistributing power over land, it actually entrenches it. Thus the principal remaining mechanism for exerting democratic accountability over land is currently the planning system. The Scottish planning system is better than in some countries, however it has significant problems, not least the unequal treatment between developers and communities. However, the pressure is now on to weaken rather than strengthen democracy in the planning system, as a result of concerted lobbying by the developers, who claim that democracy damages their industry. Again, environmental justice requires a strengthening of the democratic accountability of planning to encourage only sustainable development.