

# A draft guide for the perplexed

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## 1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper is very personal - it is one man's attempt to explore how he might "make a difference"; or at least feel that what he is doing is improving the human condition rather than compounding its problems. For I am at the enviable point in my life where I don't need to work full-time and can choose what I do with my time and life.

*The first half of the paper still has the form and content it had when it was originally written<sup>1</sup> (in Tashkent) in 1999 some 10 years after I had left political life in Scotland and started the nomadic life of a consultant in countries which were assumed to be in some sort of transition from a form of communism to capitalism.*

*How - was my question - should I use my energies and resources (time, skills, knowledge and money) in the future to best public (rather than private) advantage?*

My short 2001 note was structured around 5 questions -

- why I was pessimistic about the future and so unhappy with the activities of the programmes and organisations with whom I dealt - and with what the French have called La Pensee Unique, the post 1989 "Washington consensus"
- who were the organisations and people I admired
- what they were achieving - and what not
- how these gaps could be reduced
- how with my resources I could help that process

## 2. WHAT'S WRONG?

### 2.1 One man's picture in 2001

Despite the apparent victory in 1989 of the "Western world" over its enemy of the Twentieth Century, a growing feeling of unease and doom has been gathering - as the collapse of communism and the removal of its threat from the agenda opened ethnic conflicts and allowed more open discussion of such things as the scale of global misery and environmental disaster.

Perhaps this explains the sense of helplessness that many people were feeling at the end of the millennium

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Certainly the picture I portrayed in that paper was pessimistic -

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<sup>1</sup> in 2001 - when it had the title "Window of Opportunity for Ordinary people". I have kept the original text - and added some footnotes and a new second half which runs from section 6

## One man's perception of things in 2001

- Consumerism is killing the planet - and making people miserable<sup>2</sup>.
- The poor are getting poorer<sup>3</sup>
- Development organisations have hierarchical structures and remuneration packages which create self-serving behaviour<sup>4</sup> (World Bank staffers travel business class)
- The British political culture was always too centralised and has got worse (notwithstanding Scottish devolution). New labour has enforced "la pensee unique", repressed dissident thinking and is slowly selling the state to corporate interests<sup>5</sup>.
- It's too easy to scapegoat Blair (the UK PM) - it's in the nature of modern politics<sup>6</sup>
- Despite the extensive coverage of political corruption in Italy, Belgium, Germany, France and even Britain nothing really changes. Indeed it gets worse.
- The EU is selfish and lacks vision<sup>7</sup>

Clearly the picture has got worse - particularly since 2007!

## 2.2 Tower of Babel

For those like myself trying to identify where to place their energies, a bit problem, I felt then (and even more now), was the sheer richness of analyses, writings and organisations - all dealing with part of what is a systemic problem. Those struggling valiantly with local initiatives often don't have the time or patience to make sense of what they often see as over-shrill or theoretical writings; and those dealing academically with the large picture can sometimes be impatient with what they perhaps see as the naivety of the practitioner.

## 2.3 Where you stand depends on where you sit

Between 1975 and 1990, I was a young politician on Strathclyde Regional Council<sup>8</sup> - trying to change the bureaucratic system which was then local government<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> since I wrote that, there have been many books on the theme eg [Affluenza](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Affluenza-Oliver-James/dp/0091900115/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1301472619&sr=1-1) by Oliver James

<sup>3</sup> this needs some nuancing - clearly urban Chinese have been growing richer and some figures I saw in 2011 suggested that, globally, the poor are now in the "developed" rather than "developing" world. Two key books on this are [The Spirit Level - why inequality is better for everyone](#) (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009) and [Injustice](#) by Daniel Dorling (2010)

<sup>4</sup> a lot of critiques about the World Bank - eg Mallaby's [The World's Banker](#) (2008)

<sup>5</sup> George Monbiot's [The Captive State - the corporate takeover of Britain](#) (1999)

<sup>6</sup> Colin Leys is one of the few academics to map this

<sup>7</sup> it pays its senior staff incredible and indefensible salaries

<sup>8</sup> a state body which, due to its responsibilities for education, social work, police etc, employed 100,000 public officials. I had a leading role for its first 16 years of life.

<sup>9</sup> In 1978 I wrote a small book around the questions the citizen activists I was working with were asking me about the reorganised system of local government in Scotland - [The Search for Democracy](#) (1978)

responsible for the development of what became Britain's first strategy for social inclusion and of community structures and enterprise<sup>10</sup>.

The work I have been doing since 1990 in public administration reform in transition countries confronts many of the same issues - but on a much larger national and global scale and with the added dimension of the more visible signs of poverty and environmental disaster in places such as Romania and the Aral Sea.

I have lived in 10 countries during these 2 decades - for an average of almost two years apiece - in the meantime keeping up (not least through the internet) with socio-political developments and writing in Britain and Europe. *The role of a consultant certainly helped me develop a "distance" which leadership of a large organisation makes difficult.*

*It forced me to seek explanations for events at a more sophisticated level than scapegoating, for example.*

*And drafting briefing notes about various aspects of European systems for my beneficiaries certainly improved the quality and focus of my writing<sup>11</sup>.*

However I became critical of the "best practice" approach of foreign consultancies. The recent string of policy disasters in the British health and education fields<sup>12</sup> are part of a much more systemic problem for our government systems - as is clear in this [recent bibliography from the latest book about Blunders in Government](#)

If, after hundreds of years, the British system can't achieve a healthy policy system, how realistic are the exhortations and conditionalities imposed by the global community on transition countries?

Unrealistic expectations have been developed in many transition countries about the contribution which full-scale privatisation can make to the improvement of services such as water, railways, health and education<sup>13</sup>. This comes from the hypnotic effect which the possibility of foreign investment brings to capital-starved nations and too many western consultants peddling, for whatever reasons, a simplistic model.

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<sup>10</sup> this is described and analysed in detail in a paper "Organisational Learning and Political Amnesia" which can be accessed on my website at

<http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Lessons%20from%20SRC%20experience.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> I was vain enough to set up a website in 2007 in order to make the papers publicly available!

<http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/>

<sup>12</sup> I don't know now (2011) exactly what this referred to - but can quote more recent examples - see

<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2010/03/policy-amnesia.html>

<sup>13</sup> see the excellent series on the various experiences produced by the Public Services International Research Unit <http://www.psir.org/>

## 2.4 Global crisis of 2007- 2011

I don't have the patience to try to wade through (let alone make sense of) the huge literature there is on this. Let me simply refer the more patient of my readers to some who have made the effort - and lived to tell the tale! Howard Davies identified 38 different explanations (!) in his [The Financial Crisis - Who is to blame?](#) and an economist explored the lessons of 21 recent books in [Reading about the crisis - a 21 book review](#)

## 3. THOSE WHO GAVE ME HOPE in 2001

It's interesting to see which people and organisations figured in my list!

### 3.1 Standard Bearers - who were actively proselytising to demand change

- David Korten (author of [When Corporations Rule the World](#)<sup>14</sup> (1995))
- Susan George (author of the satiric [The Lugano Report - on preserving capitalism in the twenty-first Century](#) (1999))
- George Monbiot<sup>15</sup>
- Noem Chomsky<sup>16</sup>
- Oskar Lafontaine (?)
- George Soros (?)
- Ralph Nader (?)
- Riccardo Petrella - with whom I worked in the 80s in the R.O.M.E. programme when he was a senior European official; who then became one of the leading critics of "La Pensee Unique"; and was an early activist also on water issues
- Tony Gibson's work and writings were also inspirational for community activists on housing<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2 Inspirers whose writings help extend understanding of the processes of change

- Charles Handy
- Timothy Garton Ash<sup>18</sup>
- Eric Hobsbawm<sup>19</sup>
- Marlynn Fergusson<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> available on google scholar

<sup>15</sup> Captive State

<sup>16</sup> (Znet is his website)

<sup>17</sup> [The Power in our hands](#) (1995)

<sup>18</sup> the historian who was in clandestine contact in the 1980s with the dissidents in communist countries and published his reflections about the transition process in the 1990s in the pages of journals such as the New York Review of Books.

<sup>19</sup> The Marxist historian

- Richard Douthwaite<sup>21</sup>
- Theodor Zeldin<sup>22</sup>
- Colin Leys<sup>23</sup>
- The Stephen Covey and Peter Senge bunch (at the level of personal behaviour)

### 3.3 Organisations

- The NGO global network
- Green Peace
- UN Programme for Human Development - and other programmes which put country performance in league tables in order to shame leaders

British organisations are either too insular - or still affected by "soft" imperialism. But at least two Foundations are worthwhile - the Foundation for Social Initiative and the New Economics Foundation)

### 3.4 Journals/Yearbooks

- New Internationalist
- Third World Resurgence
- The Ecologist
- New Left review (and all the French journals like le Monde Diplomatique)
- Socialist Register
- Znet [www.zmag.org/](http://www.zmag.org/)
- Yes (David Korten's Online Journal) [www.futurenet.org/](http://www.futurenet.org/)
- Social Criticism [www.socialcritic.org/](http://www.socialcritic.org/)
- Central Europe Online [www.centraleurope.com/](http://www.centraleurope.com/)
- New Economics Foundation [www.neweconomics.org/](http://www.neweconomics.org/)

### Progressive Websites?

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

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

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

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

[www.globenet.net](http://www.globenet.net)

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<sup>20</sup> The Aquarian Conspiracy (

<sup>21</sup> who is one of the clearest writers about the growth fixation and a second book on the practical alternatives can be downloaded from [http://www.feasta.org/documents/shortcircuit/Short\\_Circuit.pdf](http://www.feasta.org/documents/shortcircuit/Short_Circuit.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> The Intimate History of Humanity (1995)

<sup>23</sup> a British academic whose distance in Africa seems to have given him a rare perspective – see his Market-Driven Politics (2003)

[http://books.google.com/books?id=VMM8g0CcdEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=VMM8g0CcdEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

## 4. WHAT DID ALL THIS SEEM TO BE ACHIEVING IN 2001?

4.1 **Global warming is worse than we thought**

4.2 **the life of the 25% of the poor in developed countries** has not improved

4.3 **western political systems** have bought the neo-liberal doctrine that they are powerless - and glad to be so.

4.4 **media expression is more and more constrained by corporate interests**

4.5 **accountability of power remains a ritual.** Everyone preaches transparency for government. The global network for sustainable development is transparent. The Davos Forum is, however, the only transparent part of the dense network which ensures that corporate power marches on. The Tripartite Leadership Forum (?) has for a long time coordinated the global development of la pensee unique - and funded seminars to cultivate the significant younger western politicians. The European Roundtable of Industrialists is a network of the 46 Chief Executives of the largest companies in Europe and has had an agenda for Europe which they discuss monthly with EU political leaders.

## 5. WHERE TO PUT ONE'S ENERGIES?

In 2001, I offered the following -

### 5.1 The political system?

Some politicians have insights<sup>24</sup> and goodwill - but unfortunately it is a mistake to look there for any help. It was all said so clearly in the early part of the last century by Robert Michels (in 1911) that once you have become a full-time politician you have to cut your cloth to hang on to your salary. And in 1945 Schumpeter<sup>25</sup> clearly spelled out that the function of elections and the political system is simply to allow us to choose between competing elites. Nowadays you listen to your party boss - and what the focus groups tell you about the marginal voter.

Perhaps we need a system more like the Swiss - trouble is that the *German Greens* had this policy and had to give it up. And the American Republicans soon reneged on their policy of 2 terms only.

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<sup>24</sup> the best writing in the UK has been by mavericks such as Chris Mullin, Tony Benn and Tony Wright

<sup>25</sup> Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy

## 5.2 Pressure Groups?

The larger NGOs are now substantial bureaucracies and are attracting some criticism - about accountability and the problems they have in cooperating (since they need high and distinctive public profiles if they are to continue to attract funds). And if they are too coherent their analysis of the sources of the problems, they run the risk of being labelled political and left-wing.

But their critique now needs to move beyond specific institutions to the financial interests which sustain the new global (dis)order.

## 5.3 Progressive Capitalists?

Too few - although "green investment" is beginning to gather force

## 5.4 Individual Action?

A noticeable phenomenon is that, when some politicians retire and no longer have the competitive pressures on them, they become more critical about the domestic and global systems they accepted when they were in office. The same is true of many officials. There must be a great potential amongst those who have

- Time (now retired)
- money
- Education (higher than any previous generation) and potential understanding (because of the impact of the NGO critique)
- An interest (satisfaction in making a contribution)
- Conscience ("I've taken - now I should give a little back")
- A greater chance of persuasion by virtue of their patent lack of vested interest - and being late converts
- networks

Surely a significant number of retired officials, academics and consultants in UK and ?? can be encouraged to come together; learn from one another - and develop ways of communicating and acting to make their concerns about national and global systems more influential? Transparency International is a good recent example of such an initiative.

## 5.5 an initial response

I shared all the above with Keith Yates who had been the principal support (as a senior Regional official) for the political efforts I had made between 1975-90 in Strathclyde Regional Council to encourage community enterprise and who had since then become Chief Executive of Stirling District Council in Scotland. His response was to spell out the potential of the internet -

*We should realise that the processes we have wrestled with for much of our working lives are fundamentally flawed because they are designed around the self-perpetuating interests of organisations, be they governments, the EU, or corporate business. The oligarchies that*

*inevitably develop in all these bodies are kept together by dubious affiliation to a club. This may be a political party or a profession; a religion or an interest group; an ethnic group or an old boy club. They may have common objectives but these are perhaps subservient to the maintenance of the power structure.*

*It has been very difficult to challenge these silos of power because it is assumed that only those with inside knowledge have the credentials to raise justified objections. By their very nature they circle the wagons any time the fundamental nature or assured nature of their power base is threatened. This is the history of most political parties and professional organisations. They were allowed to continue in this way because of information confidentiality. So long as things were kept on closed files only capable of careful investigation by legal processes and lengthy scrutiny most closed shop practices were allowed to continue within whatever ethical code pertained to that organisation.*

*Recently this has begun to change- not because of freedom of information, which is still a sham in most organisations, but because information is now capable of being classified and scrutinised by the Internet search engine. **This is the new revolution for citizens across the globe.** We have a tool that breaks all the protocols of hierarchy, professional domains and codes of social intercourse. However we also know that many writers are assuming that globalisation will be the outcome. Small local businesses will be wiped out by the cartels of global e businesses. But is that true or is there a far more powerful outcome from the use of the internet which will see a paradigm shift in power putting it back with the citizen who will have the right to choose and demand their rights as the boundaries come tumbling down.*

*The internet could be the ultimate extension of the franchise of citizens. Providing a dynamic and continuous sharing of good practice across the world. This could be for water purification, the monitoring of climate change or, and **this is the project with the greatest promise**, the classification of companies, government (local and national) according to a kite mark of sustainability, accountability or whatever the democratic idealists want. Is it back to the ideals of John Stuart Mill- the greatest happiness for the greatest number? As he said responsibility for the survival of society must remain with the individual. The evidence from the last century is that government, whether democratic or not, has not been very good at managing the survival of people or the planet. We need a mechanism supported by the people, which creates **the rights of world citizens.***

*Let me give a couple of examples about how apparent globalisation through the internet could be most powerful for the local state, not corporate business and their governments. Procurement - the command and control freaks that run government in Britain believe that we should create buying consortia across all public services where we can negotiate the best discounts for books, computers, office furniture etc. The effect, as we have seen when this has operated in local government, is that we get monopoly providers, the closing down of local suppliers and the eventual increase in costs by the winning contractor. We have an electronic purchase card system, which allows all our managers to identify the cost from different suppliers, including local ones who usually have the fastest delivery times, using the Internet and achieve sustainable savings. It is after all their delegated budget. We are achieving local solutions and local savings. It also allows diversity and the protection of indigenous skills. Nevertheless we are been backed into the corner by big brother to join*

*the new national scheme. Secondly there is a real disassembling of the medical fraternity who have hidden behind oaths and colleges forever. It is the ability to recognise patterns of treatment and for patients to test diagnoses on the Internet that has led to a number of successful challenges against the medical profession that had previously been covered up. None of us want to undermine the respect of the profession but there is now the chance to avoid the closed shop of investigation in the future.*

*Well where does this lead? I suppose I am saying that democracy can at last be given the legs to get beyond the episodic election cycle and party machine and infiltrate the operation of all our public and private institutions. It would have to start with a specific number of performance measures. Ones that are essential for global advancement but require to be measured, monitored and progressed locally. So is there a project around this?*

And, indeed, indices of good governance and corporate responsibility have developed apace since then<sup>26</sup> - accompanied by a fascinating debate as to whether the internet can live up to its initial democratic promise<sup>27</sup>. I shall return to this issue later in the paper.

## **6. Some soul-searching**

These, then, were some of my reflections 10 years ago.

Now the blunt question - what have I done since then to live a less selfish life?

It was Charles Handy who introduced us all to the notion of a "life portfolio" - so how, if at all, have I changed my life and work portfolio to better reflect the concerns I was feeling about the world?

The bursting of the financial bubble shortly after I wrote all this dashed my expectations of being able to retire early and live off the proceeds of my savings. I continued to take full-time assignments (in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Bulgaria, Romania and China) but, in early 2009, became disgusted with the senselessness of it all and found myself unable to take any more. I resigned from a couple of projects and stopped looking seriously for new ones.

By then I had started a website to put some of my papers and concerns about public administration reform into the public domain<sup>28</sup>.

In 2006 (and 2008) I delivered a critique of the sort of consultancy I was seeing in transition countries to the Annual Conference of NISPAcee<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldwide\\_Governance\\_Indicators](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldwide_Governance_Indicators)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.opendemocracy.net/guy-aitchison/how-capitalism-is-turning-internet-against-democracy-and-how-to-turn-it-back> and <http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/662>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/>

When administering the Belbin Team test to some of my staff in the same year, I discovered that I was a "resource person" - in other words with a passion for sharing information and working networks. This certainly is how I had worked in Strathclyde Regional Council from 1974-90 - using my position as Secretary of the ruling Labour Group to bring people together across professional, social, academic and political boundaries and working in some European networks. And I have always had this strange urge to write critical reflections on the projects for which I was responsible<sup>30</sup> - trying also to link up to the wider social science literature which I continued to consume avidly.

So clearly the proportion of my time being taken up with writing has increased - the mountain retreat I acquired in 2001 giving me latterly the solitude and atmosphere which reflection needs<sup>31</sup>.

But I readily confess that I am not working the networks! I just throw my thoughts into the ether and wait for people to come to me!

But perhaps that is indeed my role? I straddle worlds that few people do; have read more widely than most other practitioners; do not pretend to have original thoughts; enjoy summarising books and articles and sharing that with others. Of course

I thoroughly enjoyed the heady "buzz" that went with the political-bureaucratic action I had from 1968-90; and also the lecturing I did. And I do miss the seminars I did with middle-level officials in places like Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

But perhaps my role is to help and challenge the younger people who are now doing all this - not least by gentle scepticism<sup>32</sup> about "the new" - particularly when they dare to challenge the prevailing wisdoms and actually take direct action?

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<sup>29</sup> <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/The%20Long%20Game%20-%20not%20the%20logframe.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> I would produce papers with titles which often echoed Lenin's plaintive "What is to be done"?. One nickname I had amongst some Regional colleagues was "paperback writer"!

<sup>31</sup> and the internet keeping me in constant touch with the world outside

<sup>32</sup> A recent paper of mine on the website celebrates scepticism -

<http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Just%20words%20-%20jan%2013.pdf>

## 7. Four questions

Close readers of the blog may recollect that I suggested recently<sup>33</sup> that any convincing argument for systemic reform need to tackle four questions -

- Why do we need major change in our systems?
- Who or what is the culprit?
- What programme might start a significant change process?
- What mechanisms (process or institutions) do we need to implement such programmes?

Most books in this field focus more on the first two questions - and are much lighter on the last two questions. The first two questions require pretty demanding analytical skills - of an interdisciplinary sort which, as I've argued, the very structure of universities actively discourages. Hence the limited choice of authors - perhaps the two best known being [Immanuel Wallerstein](#) and [Manuel Castells](#). Both offer complex systemic views and, given the nature of their study, the writing style is not very accessible. [Susan Strange](#) made a great contribution to our practical understanding of *Casino Capitalism* as she called it - until her very sad death a decade ago.

Sadly, two other well-known names with a much more accessible writing style - Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein - tend to focus a lot of their energy on rogue states such as the USA.

Will Hutton's [The World We're In](#) (2002) was as powerful and accessible of the limitations of the Anglo-saxon model as you will ever read - and, with his stakeholder concept, carried with it a more optimistic view of the possibilities of reform. He is one of the people who has the wide inter-disciplinary reading necessary for anyone to have anything useful to say to us about how we might edge societies away from the abyss we all seem to be heading toward.

I've used the verb „edge“ because the calls for revolution which come from the old leftists are unrealistic (if not self-indulgent) but mainly because, historically, significant change has rarely come from deliberate social interventions. It has come from a more chaotic process.

More and more disciplines are applying chaos theory in recognition of this - [even management](#) which is less a discipline than a parasite! So the call these days is for paradigm shift to help us in the direction of the systemic change the world needs to make in its move away from neo-liberalism.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2010/11/four-basic-questions.html>

[David Korten's various books](#) also offer good analysis - although his focus on the American corporation does not easily carry to Europe (See William Davies' recent [Reinventing the Firm](#) for a recent attempt). You can read *Korten's review of a Soros book* [here](#). Archdruid offers *a contrary view* [here](#) - although I'm not quite sure what to make of this particular blog - archdruid indeed!!

Most commentary on the recent global financial crisis has identified banks as the culprit - and those governments who made the move in recent decades to free banks from the regulation to which they have been subject. Marxists such as David Harvey have reminded us that government and banking behaviour is simply a reflection of a deeper issue - of surplus capital.

## **8. Anger and impotence in the body politic - a case study in understanding why and how?**

*Conventional politics appears to have become irretrievably part of the malaise rather than offering any hope for a cure. But political activity outside the mainstream is stifled by a bought media. British democracy has lost its meaning. The political and economic system has come to serve the interests of a tiny elite, vastly wealthier than the run of the population, operating through corporate control. The state itself exists to serve the interests of these corporations, guided by a political class largely devoid of ideological belief and preoccupied with building their own careers and securing their own finances. A bloated state sector is abused and milked by a new class of massively overpaid public sector managers in every area of public provision - university, school and hospital administration, all executive branches of local government, housing associations and other arms length bodies. All provide high six figure salaries to those at the top of a bloated bureaucratic establishment. The "left", insofar as it exists, represents only these state sector vested interests. These people decide where the cuts fall, and they will not fall where they should - on them. They will fall largely on the services ordinary people need.*

Craig Murray<sup>34</sup>

### **8.1 Much sound and fury - and so little light!**

Everyone, of course, is an expert on this! British<sup>35</sup> government is one of the most studied in the world. For a relatively small country, its combination of history, empire, flexible constitution, liberal politics and (global) language has given its outpourings about the nature and effects of its various political and administrative structures and processes a global impact.

And yet I am struck with the absence of realistic and critical studies of the efficacy of the British governance arrangements at this point in the 21st Century - although most Brits (or rather English) accept that their political system is in a dreadful state. I have thought long and hard - and can produce only four analyses

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2010/11/the\\_stew\\_of\\_cor/](http://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2010/11/the_stew_of_cor/)

<sup>35</sup> It is now becoming more respectable and truthful to talk of "English" government - although, despite the resumption (after almost three centuries of a Scottish parliament, the levers of power still remain at a British level

which might be read with benefit by the concerned and perplexed in that country.  
Two are 10 years old - the other two 5 years old.

To these four I award my special accolade and recommendation!

## **8.2 Why is it important to have a systematic, up-to-date and plausible statement about how (well) our governance arrangements (or architecture) work?**

*First as a check (or benchmark) for the myriad initiatives which governments have inflicted at large cost on an increasingly confused public and public servants. This is widely accepted as a major problem - the new Prime Minister, for example, had promised not to inflict any more changes on the health service - and yet, within a few weeks, he was making plans to introduce one of the biggest organisational upheavals ever seen.*

*But a second, even more powerful reason why a critical study is needed is that the British public no longer feels that it is worth engaging in democratic politics. "They are all the same - promising one thing, doing another - looking after themselves". In the 1970s some academics helped pave the way for the neo-liberal revolution by demonstrating in addition (in the new field of implementation studies<sup>36</sup>) that the machinery of bureaucracy made it very difficult to implement political decisions; the popular phrase was "the overloaded state". Margaret Thatcher completed the hollowing out of democracy by her infamous slogan - There is no alternative (TINA)*

Consistent with the post-modernist mood, Gerry Stoker places the problem firmly within our own minds -

*A propensity to disappoint is an inherent feature of governance even in democratic societies. I think that a substantial part of the discontent with politics is because the discourse and practice of collective decision-making sits very uncomfortably alongside the discourse and practice of individual choice, self-expression and market-based fulfilment of needs and wants. As a result too many citizens fail appreciate these inherent characteristics of the political process in democratic settings.*

*Making decisions through markets relies on individuals choosing what suits them. The political processes that are essential to steer government struggle to deliver against the lionization of individual choice in our societies. Democracy means that you can be involved in the decision but what the decision is not necessarily your choice yet you are expected to accept the decision. As a form of collective decision-making politics is, even in a democracy, a centralized form of decision-making compared to market-based alternatives.*

## **8.3 The academic contribution - why so minimal?**

We have, of course, countless academic studies of the operation of the British Parliament, of political parties, of voting systems, of local government, of devolved

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3686664/>

arrangements, of the civil service, of public management (whether Ministries, core executive, agencies), of the Prime Minister's Office, of the European dimension etc - and a fair number of these are reasonably up-to-date. But most of it is written for undergraduates - or for other academic specialists who focus on one small part of the complex jigsaw. **There is so very little which actually tries to integrate all this and give a convincing answer to the increasing number of citizens who feel (like Craig Murray) that there is no longer any point in voting; that politicians are either corrupt or hopelessly boxed in by global finance and corporate interests.**

I used the epithet "realistic" above in order to distinguish the older studies which painted a rather ideal picture of the formalities of the system (what the 19th century Walter Bagehot called the "dignified" parts) from the more rounded studies of the "hidden" (as Bagehot called it) or informal processes of government. This focus on the informal was encouraged by the seminal 1970s book about the British budget process - *The Private government of public money* by the outsiders Heclo and Wildavsky.

A "Critical" study or analysis is a more complex term - since the word can mean "carping" to the man in the street or textual deconstruction to an academic. When I use the phrase critical study (as Humpty Dumpty might have said) I mean one which tries not only to describe a system but to assess how well it works (begging the obvious question - For whom?!)

*"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"*  
*"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'," Alice objected.*  
*"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less."*  
*"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."*  
*"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master, that's all."*  
*Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"*

Despite the knowledge which academics in political science, sociology or public management can bring to the subject, *several major factors seem to conspire to prevent social scientists from making any critical contribution to our understanding of the health of the governance system.* First is the *strength of academic specialisation* - which has discouraged and continues to discourage the sort of inter-disciplinary approach needed to explore the question of the capacity of a governance system. Then there is the *aloofness of the academic tradition* which makes it difficult for specialists to engage in critiques which might be seen as too political. Not, however, that this prevented people like Peter Self from lambasting the nonsenses of market thinking in government in the 1980s.

Colin Leys' Market-driven Politics (2003) and Alysson Pollok's in *NHS p/c* (2004) are powerful critiques of the effect of commodification on some public services and get high recommendation from me - but they are partial analyses of the system.

Rod Rhodes is a more typical example - a leading public administration academic who invented the phrase "hollowed-out executive" to describe the loss of government functions in the last 30 years - but who chose to keep his critique incestuous both in the language and outlets he used. He played a major role in developing the "network" understanding of government - but then allowed anthropological and phenomenological assumptions to overwhelm him.

The blandishments of consultancy are a potential counter pressure to this tradition - which gets a small minority of academics, however, too engaged with peripheral issues of the sort which so excite the limited time-span of civil servants and Ministers.

A final factor explaining the lack of academic contribution to the understanding of the nature of our current democratic system is the contempt in which academics who write for (and become popular with) the wider public are held in the academic community - and the damage which is therefore done to one's academic career if one chooses that path. I remember how the charismatic historian AJP Taylor was treated. And it's interesting that Zygmunt Baumann began to write his books only after he retired from academia.

Major developments in public management have, of course, encouraged academics like Norman Flynn to present and assess them for a wider public. And the same has happened in the field of constitutional theory - eg Anthony King's The British Constitution (2007).

But the first is a bit long on descriptions and the second on historical figures. And both are very partial pictures of the governance system.

Colin Hay and Gerry Stokes are perhaps the two academics who have tried best to deal with the British public's alienation in recent years from the political process - [writing this piece in 2008](#) about the situation.

#### **8.4 The journalists' contribution**

Some Journalists have made an honourable effort over the decades to give the wider public some critical overviews - starting with Anthony Sampson who famously tried to track the operations of the system over 4 decades finishing his last, angriest version only months before his death in 2004.

Andrew Marr had a book in the mid 1990s - *Ruling Britannia* - on the failure and future of British democracy. So did Simon Jenkins (*Accountable to None* - 1996).

But it was a campaigning (rather than mainstream) journalist who produced in 2001 the most revealing and critical study *Captive State - the corporate takeover of Britain* which gave us the real detail, for example, behind Gordon Brown's horrendous Private Financial Initiative (PFI) and it is therefore Monbiot's book which is **my first nomination** - despite being now 10 years old and concentrating its attention on only part of the picture (the political-business interface). Part of the critique, of course, of our governance arrangements is how the corporate ownership of the media has muzzled the critical journalistic voice.

Will Hutton is very eloquent about that in his latest book.

Some politicians, of course, do produce books which advance our understanding of the whole process. I speak not of Tony Blair - and that whole self-justifying political autobiographical genre - but of the writings of people such as RHS Crossman (on whose notes on Bagehot I grew up); John McIntosh (who was my tutor); Leo Abse (whose book *Private Member* was a marvellous psychological study of politicians); David Marquand; and, of course, the monumental diaries of Tony Benn. And New Labour had some honourable people in its ranks - who accepted that their critical or maverick approach denied them office. Chris Mullin was one - and has given us 2 wry reflections of politics and government in action. But, over 50 years, not a single title which deserves the epithet "critical".

Tony Wright is an academic who for more than a decade operated quietly as Chairman of the prestigious Select Committee on Public Administration and helped produce a raft of critical reports on various aspects of governance operations. How retired from parliament, he has become a Professor (of Politics) and I look to him for some of the missing critique. Pity he can't get together with George Monbiot to produce an expanded and updated version of the GB book!!

Some months ago I said that noone seemed to be celebrating the anniversary of Robert Michels' *Political Parties* which appeared a hundred years ago and which was one of the seminal books of my university years - suggesting that trade unions and social democratic parties were inevitably destined to betrayal from their leaders through the "iron law of oligarchy". Peter Osborne's *The Triumph of the Political Class* <http://www.spectator.co.uk/print/essays/162011/the-establishment-is-dead-but-something-worse-has-replaced-it.html> appeared in 2007 - but is a worthy successor to Michels - and offers important perspectives to the various posts I've made about the collapse of our democracy

<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2010/11/democratic-discontents.html>

"Lewis Namier (1888-1960) argued in his masterwork *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* that talk of great battles of principle between the Whigs and

*Tories of Hanoverian England was nonsense. Ministers were in politics for the money and to advance the interests of their cliques. MPs who boasted of their independence were forever seeking favours from the public purse. Ideology mattered so little that 'the political life of the period could be fully described without ever using a party denomination'. You can do the same today, argues Peter Osborne in this thought-provoking polemic. Members of the 21st-century 'political class' are as isolated and self-interested as their Georgian predecessors. The political class is very different from the old establishment. It despises the values of traditional institutions that once acted as restraints on the power of the state - the independence of the judiciary, the neutrality of the Civil Service and the accountability of ministers to the Commons.*

*If you are young and ambitious and want to join, Osborne sketches out a career path. First, you must set yourself apart from your contemporaries at university by taking an interest in politics. You must join a think-tank or become researcher to an upwardly mobile MP on graduation. Before getting to the top, you will have eaten with, drunk with and slept with people exactly like you, not only in politics but in the media, PR and advertising, trades the old establishment despised, but you admire for their ability to manipulate the masses. You will talk a language the vast majority of your fellow citizens can't understand and be obsessed with the marketing of politics rather than its content. You will notice that once in power, you can get away with behaviour that would have stunned your predecessors. You can use your position to profit from lecture tours and negotiate discounts, as the wife of PM Tony Blair uniquely did. Politics will be your career. You will have no experience of other trades and, paradoxically, be a worse politician for it. Because you've never managed a budget or a large institution or served in the armed forces, the likelihood is that you will waste vast amounts of public money and send British troops into battle unprepared".*

### **8.5 The shadowy world of Advisers and Think-Tankers**

So far I've discussed academics, journalists and politicians. But what about the shadowy world of political advisers, Think Tanks and NGOs? As we might expect from such a concentration of putative brainpower, three of my 4 recommendations come from this stable. *Political Power and democratic control - the democratic audit of the United Kingdom* was commissioned by the Rowntree Trust and produced in 1999 - by Stuart Weir and David Beetham. Weir followed it up in 2009 with a short spoof constitution of the UK. These focus very much on the centralisation of power.

**My third nominee** for useful study of government capacity is ubiquitous (advisor) Chris Foster's *British Government in Crisis* (2005) which extends the analysis to the administrative aspects which Flynn describes but which (as befits someone who was a senior Price Waterhouse employee) fails to mention the interstices with the business world.

**My final nomination** is another product of a British Foundation - Rowntree again. *Power to the People* (2006) was the result of an independent inquiry (which in true

british tradition invited evidence and organised dialogues) and can therefore reasonably be seen as a mainstream diagnosis and set of prescriptions. I would fault it only because of its basic assumption that, if the system is made more transparent, representative, decentralised and accountable, everything will be OK

## 8.6 Conclusion?

*Mass democracies face a potential crisis because of the scale of discontent surrounding the political process. Discontent comes in two main forms: disengagement from politics and frustrated activism. If the twentieth century saw the establishment of mass democracy the scale of discontent surrounding the political process in these democracies runs the risk of making these systems unsustainable in the twenty first century.*

Gerry Stoker

After all this scribbling, then we are left with a central question - is the British problem one of political centralisation? of government overreach? A failure of the political class? Adversarial politics? Civil service incompetence? Corporate takeover? Or, as Stoker argues, misunderstanding? At one or time or another in the past 5 decades each has been proposed as the key problem - and led to frenetic initiatives. Little wonder that I am sympathetic to systems approaches or to constraints on government initiatives! So far, so parochial! A key question I would like some help on is the extent to which this concern is a British/Anglo-saxon phenomenon - or a wider European issue.

## 9. THE SEARCH FOR A BETTER WAY - three schools

*"The past thirty years have witnessed the systematic disassembly of the institutions of social democracy in most countries. And the consequences are predictable: more inequality, more deprivation, more severe disparities of life outcomes for different social groups. What is truly surprising is that there has been so little continuing exploration of alternatives in the intervening two decades. Democratic theorists have explored alternative institutions in the category of deliberative democracy ([link](#)), but there hasn't been much visioning of alternative economic institutions for a modern society. We don't talk much anymore about "economic justice," and the case for social democracy has more or less disappeared from public debate. But surely it's time to reopen that public debate."<sup>37</sup>*

Perhaps it might be more precise to say that what work there is receives little exposure? I borrowed recently a 2004 paperback *Spiritual Capital - wealth we can live<sup>38</sup>* by Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall on the basis of its promising opening pages. The author's 5 year old son wanted to know *why we had a life* - and that brought home to the author the pointlessness (if not poison) of so much modern living - and

<sup>37</sup> a March 2011 post in Daniel Little's excellent blog [Understanding Society](http://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/)- <http://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/>

<sup>38</sup> [http://books.google.com/books?id=mGGoeYfJKYC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=mGGoeYfJKYC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

how the selfishness of modern capitalism might be modified. The book itself disappointed - not least for the reasons I have criticised so many books for - failure to mention other relevant texts. Although the book mentions "stewardship", it completely fails to mention the writings of Robert Greenleaf nor, despite its subtitle, Paul Elkan's Natural Capitalism (2000) - let alone such green texts as Richard Douthwaite's)<sup>39</sup>

As befits a psychologist, Zohar focuses on motivations - and has indeed some very interesting stuff on that. For the last few years I've been struggling with this subject (neglected I feel in the literature on public management) and had identified 7 different motives in table 1 on page 15 of this paper. Zohar has 16!

It is good for political scientists and Institution Builders like myself to be reminded that all change comes from individuals. And there is a huge literature encouraging people<sup>40</sup> to improve themselves, with the frequently implicit assumption that this is the way to happiness and a better world.

But, as the literature on capacity development recognises, behavioural and social change operates at two other levels as well - the *organisational* (which is shaped by a combination of corporate governance and management systems); and *societal*.

What follows is a short literature review of those who have diagnosed various malaises of contemporary capitalism and are trying to set out ideas for dealing with them. Who is writing about this - and what change visions and processes do they suggest? What commonalities are there? What gaps? These ideas focus variously on economics and political systems - and less on individual psychology.

**The next paragraph tries simply to identify relevant writing about how the economic aspects of the present neo-liberal system might be adjusted. Analysis and synthesis is a future task**

Is it people who change systems? Or systems which change people? Answers tend to run on ideological grounds - individualists tend to say the former; social democrats the latter. And both are right! Change begins with a single step, an inspiring story, a champion. But, unless the actions "resonate" with society, they will be dismissed as mavericks, "ahead of their time".

### **Micro - Focus on ourselves!**

Cleese and Skynner; *Life - and how to survive it*

Happiness literature

Alaister Mant

Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall; *Spiritual Capital - wealth we can live by*

Tobias Jones

Daniel Dorling

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<sup>39</sup> for more detail see next section

<sup>40</sup> Jennifer Hecht has an amusing overview

Robert Quinn

**Meso - focus on the community!** (geographical and organisational)

Bill Mc Kibbin *End of Economy* (2004)

Robert Greenleaf

Isaacs dialogue

Natural Capitalism

Schumacher

Ernst von Weizsaecker *Factor Five* (2009)

The support economy

**macro - change the system**

The Breakdown of Nations; Leopold Kohr

<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2009/10/bible-for-our-times.html>

Short Circuit Douthwaite (2004)

Will Hutton

David Korten

Reinventing the Firm William Davies

Peter Barnes *Capitalism 3.0* (2006)

Enough is enough (CASSE 2010)

David Harvey *Global Capital* (2010)

Envisioning Real Utopias (2009)

Jon Elster; *Alternatives to capitalism*

### 9.1 Meso Change - working within the system

Peter Barnes published in 2006 a thoughtful critique and alternative vision *Capitalism 3.0* based on his entrepreneurial experience. All 200 pages can be downloaded from the internet<sup>41</sup>

At a more technical level, Paul Hawken published in 2000 an important book *Natural Capitalism*<sup>42 43</sup> which showed what could be done within existing frameworks. And Ernst von Weizsaecker has long been an eloquent spokesman for this approach see the 2009 *Factor Five* report for the Club of Rome.

In the UK, Will Hutton has been giving us a powerful systemic critique of the coherence of neo-liberal thinking and policies since *The State We're In* (1995) although his latest - *Them and Us* (2010) - is weaker on alternatives and fails to

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<sup>41</sup> [http://capitalism3.com/files/Capitalism\\_3.0\\_Peter\\_Barnes.pdf](http://capitalism3.com/files/Capitalism_3.0_Peter_Barnes.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> [http://books.google.com/books?id=KiepOn7khp0C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=KiepOn7khp0C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~ceses/csessite/restricted/EreadDocs/natural\\_capitalism.pdf](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~ceses/csessite/restricted/EreadDocs/natural_capitalism.pdf)

mention a lot of relevant work as I spelled out in my review<sup>44</sup>. William Davies published a useful booklet *Reinventing the Firm* (Demos 2009) which suggests some adjustments to corporate legislation on similar lines to Hutton.

## 9.2 community enterprise and social innovation

Perhaps the most readable material, however, comes from an Irish economist Richard Douthwaite whose 2003 book *Short Circuit - strengthening local economies for security in an unstable world*<sup>45</sup> is a marvellous combination of analysis and case-studies of successful community initiatives. This is from the preface to the book -

*As individuals, we face increasing insecurity in our working lives, on our streets and even within our homes. As societies, we face a ruthlessly competitive global economy, the threat of armed conflict, and a biosphere stressed to the point of collapse. In the face of all this, governments and businesses offer us, at best, a tattered, decaying safety net. Short Circuit's encouraging message is that the security we need can be found in our own communities by developing our local economies.*

*But why are communities and families fragmenting?*

*Why are thousands of species disappearing and the world's climate becoming ever more unstable?*

*Why is democracy slipping away, and ethnic conflict, poverty, crime and unemployment growing day by day?*

*The root cause of all these problems often evades even the most intelligent and well-intentioned examination. The world economic system has become so complex, and the attitudes that it has given rise to so all-pervasive, that we now find it is extremely difficult to gain a clear perspective.*

*However, there is a common thread running through these seemingly disparate crises: namely, a system of production and distribution that depends for its survival on endless expansion. This continuous growth has led to economic globalization, which essentially means the amalgamation of every local, regional and national economy into a single world system. Economic globalization is not the result of superior economic efficiency. It is coming about because governments have been subsidizing international and long-distance trade for nearly two hundred years without stopping to assess the impact on society and nature.*

*It is only through tax breaks, cheap fuel, and massive investments in the underlying transport and information infrastructure that apples from New Zealand displace French apples in the markets of Paris, European dairy products destroy local production in milk-rich Mongolia, and Dutch butter costs less than Kenyan butter in the shops of Nairobi. Even a child might ask, 'Why must food be transported thousands of miles, when it can be produced right here?' This is not efficiency but economics gone mad.*

*Globalization has also led to the growth of huge multinational corporations that have replaced the hundreds of thousands of small businesses, shopkeepers and farmers that traditionally generated most economic activity and employment. And since big firms, unlike*

<sup>44</sup>[http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/cdp/member-reviews/A216U6OYVA7FSY/ref=cm\\_cr\\_pr\\_auth\\_rev?ie=UTF8&sort\\_by=MostRecentReview](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/cdp/member-reviews/A216U6OYVA7FSY/ref=cm_cr_pr_auth_rev?ie=UTF8&sort_by=MostRecentReview)

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.feasta.org/documents/shortcircuit/Short\\_Circuit.pdf](http://www.feasta.org/documents/shortcircuit/Short_Circuit.pdf)

*small ones, can threaten to move their operations to countries where the fiscal environment is easier, almost every government's ability to raise an adequate amount in tax has been reduced. Consequently, by blindly subsidizing the process of globalization, the nation-state has promoted its own demise.*

*Moreover, by inducing people everywhere to rely on the same narrow range of industrial resources, the global economic system has greatly increased competition at every level. As a result, unemployment in the industrialized world has soared while, in the cities of the South, populations are exploding because millions of rural families are being drawn away from local self-reliance by the promises of the consumer society - only to be plunged into urban squalor and hunger. Meanwhile, wilderness areas and biodiversity are under increasing pressure as the demand for industrial resources grows.*

*The system that has emerged suits nobody: in the long run, there are no winners. Even at the highest levels of society, the quality of life is declining. The threat of mergers leaves even senior managers in permanent fear of losing their jobs. As for the burgeoning list of billionaires, try though they might to fence themselves off from the collapsing social order, they cannot hide from the collapsing biosphere.*

*It is therefore in everyone's interest that the process of globalization be reversed. The most effective way of doing this would be for governments to get together to curb the powers of the multinationals by negotiating new trade and investment treaties that would remove the subsidies powering globalization and give local production a chance. For example, if the hidden subsidies for fossil fuel use were removed, local and national economies would become much stronger. But such international measures would not in themselves restore health to economics and communities: long-term solutions require a range of small local initiatives that are as diverse as the cultures and the environments in which they take place.*

*Unfortunately, many people are opposed to the creation of stronger local economics for all manner of reasons. Some, for example, imagine that the aim of economic localization is complete self-sufficiency at the village level.*

*In fact, localization does not mean everything being produced locally, nor does it mean an end to trade. It simply means creating a better balance between local, regional, national and international markets. It also means that large corporations should have less control, and communities more, over what is produced, where, when and how, and that trading should be fair and to the benefit of both parties.*

*It is also sometimes feared that localization will lead to repression and intolerance. On closer examination, however, it is clear that the opposite is true: the global economy is itself nothing less than a system of structural exploitation that creates hidden slaves on the other side of the world and forces people to give up their rights to their own resources. Localization is not about isolating communities from other cultures, but about creating a new, sustainable and equitable basis on which they can interact. In the North, being responsible for our own needs means allowing the South to produce for itself, rather than for us.*

*All over the world, campaigns against globalization are growing in strength as people see how*

*it affects their lives, their high streets, and their neighbourhoods - and as they become more aware that there are alternatives. The significance of Richard Douthwaite's book is that he shows that globalization can be contained by using these alternatives in a coherent way. He also shows we can start to build alternative systems today without waiting for politicians to give us their blessing or for the world to burn. When community initiatives work (and *Short Circuit* describes both successes and failures) they release the imagination of those involved and enable them to take further steps towards economic revitalization, stronger communities, and a healthier environment. But so far, as Richard Douthwaite points out, no community anywhere has implemented more than a few of the many techniques described in this book, so the potential for revitalization is dramatic.*

See also Bill McKibben's writings - eg [Deep Economy: Economics as if the World Mattered](#)

### 9.3 The system changers

And then there are the indefatigable writers on the left who are stronger on description than prescription - although David Harvey's latest book *The Enigma of Capital* does try to sketch out a few alternatives.

Since *When Corporations Rule the World* (1995) David Korten has been critiquing the operation of companies and setting out alternatives - using both books and a website<sup>46</sup> He has just published a new book - *Agenda for a new economy* - much of which can be accessed at Google Scholar.

And Paul Kingsnorth's *One No - many Yeses; a journey to the heart of the global resistance movement* gives a marvellous sense of the energy a lot of people are spending fighting global capitalism in a variety of very different ways.

Olin Wright's [Envisioning Real Utopias](#) which instances the amazing Mondragon cooperatives but is otherwise an incestuous academic scribble.

People at the Centre for the advancement of the steady state economy<sup>47</sup> are doing a good job - as is evident from their latest publication *Enough is enough*<sup>48</sup> (CASSE 2010).

### 9.4 Comment

The pity is that there is not enough cross-referencing by the authors to allow us to extract the commonalities and identify the gaps. Each writer, it seems, has to forge a distinctive slant. Douthwaite is one exception. I've just started to read the

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<sup>46</sup> <http://livingeconomiesforum.org>

<sup>47</sup> [www.steadystate.org](http://www.steadystate.org)

<sup>48</sup> [http://steadystate.org/wp-content/uploads/EnoughIsEnough\\_FullReport.pdf](http://steadystate.org/wp-content/uploads/EnoughIsEnough_FullReport.pdf)

latest Korten book on google and his intro establishes the basic need - *Leadership for transformation must come, as it always does, from outside the institutions of power. This requires building a powerful social movement based on a shared understanding of the roots of the problem and a shared vision of the path to its resolution.*

This definition contains three of the crucial ingredients for the social change on the scale we need -

- External pressure
- Shared understanding of causes of problem
- Shared vision

But there are others, one of which has to be an understanding and development of the leadership qualities the task requires. The Zohar book is one of the few which explores this - and also the Robert Quinn book I keep plugging away at.

Most of the literature about social change is written from one of the three perspectives I have mentioned (micro; macro or meso) - Robert Quinn is one of the few who has looked at the area between two of them. His [Change the world; how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results](#) is an excellent antidote for those who are still fixated on the expert model of change - those who imagine it can be achieved by "telling", "forcing" or by participation. Quinn exposes the last for what it normally is (despite the best intentions of those in power) - a form of manipulation - and effectively encourages us, through examples, to have more faith in people. As the blurb says - "the idea that inner change makes outer change possible has always been part of spiritual and psychological teachings. But not an idea that's generally addressed in leadership and management training. Quinn looks at how leaders such as Gandhi and Luther King mobilised people for major change and derives certain principles for "change agents" to enable them to help ordinary people achieve transformative change. These principles are -

- Envisage the productive community
- Look within
- Embrace the hypocritical self
- Transcend fear
- Embody a vision of the common good
- Disturb the system
- Surrender to the emergent system
- Entice through moral power

Alaister Mant's *Leaders we deserve* is another neglected masterpiece.

Too many good ideas are killed by the personalities of the leaders. Which neatly brings us back to Daniel Little's reference to "deliberative democracy". Clearly the Anglo-Saxon adversarial system of politics affects the way we talk about public issues.

But too little of this particular literature (eg William Isaacs' *Dialogue* currently lying on my desk with *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*) refers to European practices - which are nearer their ideal. It was, after all, the German Greens who tried to deal with the problematic issue of leadership.

And let me notice in passing that too many British writers echo contemporary debates in America simply out of laziness (language). Despite the command I have of French and German, I am as guilty as the rest - as is evident from my library and bibliographies. (Although I did buy a short Jacques Attali book in 2010 on the crisis). And there was a time when people like Colin Crouch<sup>49</sup> drew our attention to the different types of capitalism - but this (and the deliberative democracy theme) seems to have disappeared. Are our attention spans so short? Or is this down to the media need for fashions?

**Basically I am trying to suggest that there is a lot of thinking going on - but it is not easily shared and stored. What can be done about this?**

## 10. Some reflections on the intervening 3 years

In the summer of 2011 I was invited to write an article for a special issue of a Romanian journal which was devoted to the world a decade after 09/11. My piece was entitled "[The Dog that didn't Bark](#)" and focussed on the general failure of radicals to capitalise on the global crisis - and, more specifically, the apparent failure of the World Social Forum which had been so active until 2005.

An article by [Geoffrey Pleyers](#) about the World Social Forum suggested two reasons for this failure - first that the Forum has been a victim of its own success (with many politicians now using their rhetoric); and, second, that the movement has now fragmented around three distinct trends -

### 10.1 A Focus on the Local Level

*Rather than getting involved in a global movement and international forums, a wide "cultural trend" of the alter-globalization movement considers that social change may only occur by implementing participatory, convivial and sustainable values in daily practices, personal life and local spaces. In many Italian social centres, critical consumption and local movements have often taken the space previously occupied by the alter-globalization movement. Local "collective purchase groups" have grown and multiplied in Western Europe and North America. Most of them gather a dozen activists who organize collective purchases from local and often organic food producers. Their goal is to make quality food affordable, to bring an alternative to the "anonymous supermarket" and to promote local social relations. The movement for a "convivial degrowth" belongs to a similar tendency and aims to implement a lifestyle that is less of a strain on natural resources and reduces waste.*

<sup>49</sup> [http://books.google.com/books?id=ueYfdeUcLuUC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=ueYfdeUcLuUC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

### **10.2 Citizens' and Experts' Advocacy Networks**

*Rather than massive assemblies and demonstrations, another component of the movement believes that concrete outcomes may be achieved through efficient single-issue networks able to develop coherent arguments and efficient advocacy. Issues like food sovereignty, Third World debt and financial transactions are considered both as specific targets and as an introduction to broader questions. Through the protection of water, activists raise for instance the issue of global public goods, oppose global corporations and promote the idea of "the long-term efficiency of the public sector" ("Water network assembly", European Social Forum 2008). After several years of intense exchanges among citizens and experts focusing on the same issue, the quality of the arguments has considerably increased. In recent years, they have become the core of social forums' dynamic. Although they get little media attention, these networks have proved efficient in many cases. During the fall of 2008, the European Water Network contributed to the decision by the City of Paris to re-municipalize its water distribution, which had been managed previously by private corporations. Debt cancellation arguments have been adopted by Ecuadorian political commissions, and some alter-globalization experts have joined national delegations in major international meetings, including the 2008 WTO negotiations in Geneva.*

### **10.3 Supporting Progressive Regimes**

*A third component of the movement believes that a broad social change will occur through progressive public policies implemented by state leaders and institutions. Alter-globalization activists have struggled to strengthen state agency in social, environmental and economic matters. Now that state intervention has regained legitimacy, this more "political" component of the movement believes that time has come to join progressive political leaders' efforts. It has notably been the case around President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela as well as President Evo Morales in Bolivia. New regional projects and institutions have been launched on this basis, like the "Bank of the South" that has adopted the main tasks of the IMF in the region. For historical reasons and their political cultures, Latin American and Indian activists are used to proximity with political parties and leaders.*

## **11. Lessons from almost 50 years of "social interventions"???**

### **11.1 Writing to try to make sense of the world**

I've been very lucky in my life - having a position of considerable political influence in the West of Scotland for 22 years from the age of 28 - and then having responsibility for a variety of capacity-building projects in central European and Central Asian governments for another 20 odd years.

From these very different vantage points (and my constant reading <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Annotated%20bibl%20for%20change%20agents%202007.pdf>) I have developed some views about what we might call social/political interventions.....Unfortunately I find that my attempt to communicate these gets perverted by language - not just my own imperfections but,

I suspect, the verbal infrastructure itself. Hence the pleasure I got from drafting a "Devil's Dictionary" to warn people about language - in **Just Words** - <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Just%20words%20-%20jan%202013.pdf>

I readily confess to being one of these annoying people who "takes stock" every few years of what has been going on in a place for which I felt some affinity and offers some uninvited (and generally unpalatable) comment.

I started the habit in the mid- 1970s and was allowed to indulge the habit by my various positions. I might say that it made few friends!

Although I continue to write a blog - I use it mainly to pass on what I consider to be useful perspectives of others who are better skilled than me, whether by virtue of their more felicitous language, their experience, reading or understanding.

### ***11.2 Some shining lights***

Over the years I have found some writers and texts resonate - even although I don't read them again very often. Leopold Kohr's *The Breakdown of Nations* is one which Paul Kingsnorth  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/25/crisis-bigness-leopold-kohr> wrote about recently -

*Kohr has a good claim to be the most important political thinker that you have never heard of. Unlike Marx, he did not found a global movement or inspire revolutions. Unlike Hayek, he did not rewrite the economic rules of the modern world. Kohr was a modest, self-deprecating man, but this was not the reason his ideas have been ignored by movers and shakers in the half century since they were produced. They have been ignored because they do not flatter the egos of the power-hungry, be they revolutionaries or plutocrats. In fact, Kohr's message is a direct challenge to them. "Wherever something is wrong," he insisted, "something is too big."*

*Published in 1957, [The Breakdown of Nations](#) laid out what at the time was a radical case: that small states, small nations and small economies are more peaceful, more prosperous and more creative than great powers or superstates. It was a claim that was as unfashionable as it was possible to make. This was the dawn of the space age - a time of high confidence in the progressive, gigantist, technology-fuelled destiny of humankind. Feted political thinkers were talking in all seriousness of creating a world government as the next step towards uniting humanity. Kohr was seriously at odds with the prevailing mood. He later commented, dryly, that his critics "dismissed my ideas by referring to me as a poet".*

*Kohr's claim was that society's problems were not caused by particular forms of social or economic organisation, but by their size. Socialism, anarchism, capitalism, democracy, monarchy - all could work well on what he called "the human scale": a scale at which people could play a part in the systems that governed their lives. But once scaled up to the level of modern states, all systems became oppressors. Changing the system, or the ideology that it claimed inspiration from, would not prevent that oppression - as any number of revolutions*

have shown - because "the problem is not the thing that is big, but bigness itself".

*Drawing from history, Kohr demonstrated that when people have too much power, under any system or none, they abuse it. The task, therefore, was to limit the amount of power that any individual, organisation or government could get its hands on. The solution to the world's problems was not more unity but more division. The world should be broken up into small states, roughly equivalent in size and power, which would be able to limit the growth and thus domination of any one unit. Small states and small economies were more flexible, more able to weather economic storms, less capable of waging serious wars, and more accountable to their people. Not only that, but they were more creative. On a whistlestop tour of medieval and early modern Europe, *The Breakdown of Nations* does a brilliant job of persuading the reader that many of the glories of western culture, from cathedrals to great art to scientific innovations, were the product of small states.*

*To understand the sparky, prophetic power of Kohr's vision, you need to read *The Breakdown of Nations*. Some of it will create shivers of recognition. Bigness, predicted Kohr, could only lead to more bigness, for "whatever outgrows certain limits begins to suffer from the irrepressible problem of unmanageable proportions". Beyond those limits it was forced to accumulate more power in order to manage the power it already had. Growth would become cancerous and unstoppable, until there was only one possible endpoint: collapse.*

Several years ago, [I reread the book and picked out several quotations](#)- of which this was one -

*the chief blessing of a small-state system is ...its gift of a freedom which hardly ever registers if it is pronounced....freedom from issues....ninety percent of our intellectual miseries are due to the fact that almost everything in our life has become an ism, an issue... our life's efforts seem to be committed exclusively to the task of discovering where we stand in some battle raging about some abstract issue... The blessing of a small state returns us from the misty sombreness of an existence in which we are nothing but ghostly shadows of meaningless issues to the reality which we can only find in our neighbours and neighbourhoods*

Kingsnorth continues that

*We have now reached the point that Kohr warned about over half a century ago: the point where "instead of growth serving life, life must now serve growth, perverting the very purpose of existence". Kohr's "crisis of bigness" is upon us and, true to form, we are scrabbling to tackle it with more of the same: closer fiscal unions, tighter global governance, geoengineering schemes, more economic growth. Big, it seems, is as beautiful as ever to those who have the unenviable task of keeping the growth machine going. This shouldn't surprise us. It didn't surprise Kohr, who, unlike some of his utopian critics, never confused a desire for radical change with the likelihood of it actually happening. Instead, his downbeat but refreshingly honest conclusion was that, like a dying star, the gigantist global system would in the end fall in on itself, and the whole cycle of growth would begin all over again. But before it did so, "between the intellectual ice ages of great-power domination", the world would become "little and free once more"*

The discussion thread to Kingsworth's article is also worth reading.

### **Material not yet used**

The events of the past few years have made millions of people angry with their political leaders and disillusioned with the political and economic systems in which they operate. But for anything to happen, there have to be feasible and legitimate options capable of gaining the support of a significant number of people. That's quite a challenging set of preconditions – feasibility, legitimacy and support!

A paper on my website tries to track the various analyses and reforms which have been offered in the past decade or so (excluding technical tinkering). But nothing will happen without catalysts for that change – individuals who have an understanding of the social process of the transformation process and the skills and credibility to ease change into place. Noone buys blueprints (let alone manifestos) any more. And politicians in many countries have lost credibility. Process is all. So where are the catalysts who have that understanding and skill sets; and who cannot be fitted into the conventional political labels?

It was by accident that I pulled a book from my library yesterday which has been lying unread since I bought it years ago. It was Paul Hirst's *From Statism to Pluralism* produced in 1997 from various papers he had written in the previous 5 years and arguing the case for "associational democracy" in both the public and private sectors. It has a powerful beginning – *"The brutalities of actually existing socialism have fatally crippled the power of socialist ideas of any kind to motivate and inspire. The collapse of communism and the decline of wars between the major industrial states have removed the major justifications for social democracy for established elites – that it could prevent the worse evil of communism and that it could harness organized labour in the national war effort. Those elites have not just turned against social democracy, but they almost seem to have convinced significant sections of the population that a regulated economy and comprehensive social welfare are either unattainable or undesirable"*.

He then goes on to argue that –

- more "associational" forms of democracy and wider decision-making would help re-balance the centralisation of the state and the dominance of big business. In this view 'association' means groups of people who have similar concerns, views, and aims.
- Associationalism (it has many similarities with mutualism <http://www.mutualist.org/id7.html>) is the most neglected of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century doctrines of social organisation. It lost out to collectivism and individualism. But conditions have now changed dramatically and make it an appropriate principle of reform and renewal of Western societies.
- widely distributed methods of decision-making, (both within and between organisations and groups throughout society and the economy) would better enable effective, informed and appropriate action. It might reduce the need for complex top-down regulation, better distribute wealth and security, and offer a potential solution to mistrust and social disintegration within communities.

Sadly Hirst died in 2003 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/1308> but I discovered yesterday that other people in Britain have recently been going back to his papers and books <http://www.opendemocracy.net/andrea-westall/time-to-revisit-associative-democracy> <http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/AssociativeDemocracy.html>. Clearly that is because of the UK Prime Minister's interest in what he calls the "Big Society" – of public services being managed by its workers (part of the mutualist approach) or by community and voluntary organizations (social enterprise). Although Cameron was talking about this before the global crisis, the concept is a bit suspect these days with such large cuts in public expenditure. However, social enterprise has a long and honourable tradition and was one I was proud to work for in the 1980s. A recent article set out how the Hirst agenda and social enterprise fit [http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2011/658\\_243.pdf](http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2011/658_243.pdf)

However the elephant in the room is the Big Corporation – and here the limits of (if not the motives for) the Cameron agenda are perhaps most exposed. And Hirst too does not say much about the economic side of things which Will Hutton was so eloquent about at the same time (stakeholder society) – beyond a few comments about the “industrial districts of Italy”. Although Germany gets a brief passing remark or two, I find it astounding that the “corporatist” model of North Europe does not get proper treatment. Is that because “corporatism” got a bad name in Britain in the 1970s (it was blamed for the poor economic performance) – or because the Brits (and Americans) are so myopic about foreign activities? We should not underestimate the power of words and phrases – but I suspect the explanation is more the latter.

I find it ironic that we seemed interested in the 1960s in what we could learn from France and other European countries about industrial policy but that we have no such interest when we are part of the European Union. Apart from the usual academic books about German politics, I know of only two general books on Germany – the idiosyncratic *Germania* by Simon Winder and Peter Watson’s doorstopper *German Genius* – neither of which says anything about how Germany has managed to become such a politically and economically resilient country. The only serious article I know about the country <http://newleftreview.org/?view=2778> are the 60 pages in Perry Anderson’s *The New Old World*. However there is a recent academic paper which explores why a “coordinated market economy” was first chosen as the appropriate model for Germany; and why it might still be the most appropriate for Germany but for other EC countries [http://www.ces.fas.harvard.edu/info\\_for/visiting/papers/Allen\\_CES\\_Apr21.pdf](http://www.ces.fas.harvard.edu/info_for/visiting/papers/Allen_CES_Apr21.pdf)

In 1987 a book and a film appeared in America which seemed to signal a questioning of the greed culture which had received the imprint of approval from Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. The book was Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities* which ended with the come-uppance of one of Wall Street’s “Masters of the universe”. The film was *Wall Street; Money never sleeps* - starring Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko whose signature line was “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good”.

Alas, the reflective mood was momentary – indeed the broader effect seemed to have been to persuade other professions to get into the act. A decade later, a distinguished historian, Harold Perkin, published *The Third Revolution - Professional Elites in the Modern World* (1996) <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/29>. In previous books Perkin had studied the rise of professional society. In this one he looked at Twentieth Century elites in the USA, England, France, Germany, Russia and Japan - and finds their behaviour equally deficient and morally irresponsible. What all six countries, except Germany, are found to have in common are greed and corruption, from the wholesale fraud, embezzlement, and bribery practised by Soviet *apparatchiks*, through the systematic bribery of Japanese politicians by the big corporations, and the apparently general corruption in French local government contracts, to the more ‘legitimate’ but dubiously ethical machinations of junk bond merchants in the U. S. or take-over conmen in Britain. This is attributed to the professional elites who are ‘good servants but bad masters’, and when they have power are liable to abuse it, exploit the masses, and line their own pockets. At this point one cannot help concluding that there is nothing new under the sun, that ruling elites or cliques have always been tempted to enrich themselves, and that corruption, even blatant and very large- scale corruption, is not an invention of professional society.

It is a book which should be given to each individual when (s)he makes it into their country’s “Who’s Who” and becomes part of the “system”.

A few years earlier, a powerful but different critique of our elites had been launched by Christopher Lasch - *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*. The book’s title is a take-off on Jose Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses*, a reactionary work published in 1930 that ascribed the crisis of Western culture to the “political domination of the masses.” Ortega believed that the rise of the masses threatened democracy by undermining the ideals of civic virtue that characterized the old ruling elites. But in late twentieth-century America it is not the masses so much as an emerging elite of professional and managerial types who constitute the greatest threat to democracy, according to Lasch. The new cognitive elite is made up of what Robert Reich called

"symbolic analysts" — lawyers, academics, journalists, systems analysts, brokers, bankers, etc. These professionals traffic in information and manipulate words and numbers for a living. They live in an abstract world in which information and expertise are the most valuable commodities. Since the market for these assets is international, the privileged class is more concerned with the global system than with regional, national, or local communities. In fact, members of the new elite tend to be estranged from their communities and their fellow citizens. "They send their children to private schools, insure themselves against medical emergencies ... and hire private security guards to protect themselves against the mounting violence against them," Lasch writes. "In effect, they have removed themselves from the common life."

The privileged classes, which, according to Lasch's "expansive" definition, now make up roughly a fifth of the population, are heavily invested in the notion of social mobility. The new meritocracy has made professional advancement and the freedom to make money "the overriding goal of social policy." "The reign of specialized expertise," he writes, "is the antithesis of democracy as it was understood by those who saw this country as the 'last, best hope of earth'". Citizenship is grounded not in equal access to economic competition but in shared participation in a common life and a common political dialogue. The aim is not to hold out the promise of escape from the "labouring classes," Lasch contends, but to ground the values and institutions of democracy in the inventiveness, industry, self-reliance, and self-respect of working people.

The decline of democratic discourse has come about largely at the hands of the elites, or "talking classes," as Lasch refers to them. Intelligent debate about common concerns has been almost entirely supplanted by ideological quarrels, sour dogma, and name-calling. The growing insularity of what passes for public discourse today has been exacerbated, he says, by the loss of "third places" — beyond the home and workplace — which foster the sort of free-wheeling and spontaneous conversation among citizens on which democracy thrives. Without the civic institutions — ranging from political parties to public parks and informal meeting places — that "promote general conversation across class lines," social classes increasingly "speak to themselves in a dialect of their own, inaccessible to outsiders."

Lasch proposes something else: a recovery of what he calls the "populist tradition," and a fresh understanding of democracy, not as a set of procedural or institutional arrangements but as an ethos, one that the new elites have been doing their best to undermine.

It has to be said that neither book made much impact — perhaps they were just seen as "moralizing". Contrast that with the impact made in 1958 by JK Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*. Has any recent book, I wonder, made the same impact? Perhaps the *Spirit Level* — why equality is better for everyone <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/node/400> by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009) comes closest.