

The irregular



No. 1



Part of the protest against the G8 summit at Geneva, May 30th, 2003

Water Trouble

It takes one barrel of water to produce one barrel of oil.

"A freshwater crisis has already begun that threatens to leave much of the world dry in the next twenty years. One-third of the world's population is starved for water. In Israel, extraction has surpassed replacement by 2.5 billion meters in the last 25 years. There are 250 million new cases of water-related diseases annually, chiefly cholera and dysentery, and ten million deaths. What's more, vital regions are destabilized as contending countries dispute who controls limited water resources." - Jeffrey Rothfeder, Boston Globe, January 2002.

"The next world war will be over water." - former World Bank Vice President Ismail Serageldin.

"Water, Water Everywhere and Not a Drop to Drink"

Perhaps the issue of water is left unspoken on the global level because the transnational corporations supported by powerful Western governments contribute largely to water pollution and privatization and do not want to draw attention to this fact lest they be forced to clean up their acts and sacrifice profits. Certainly higher standards and levels of accountability would be imposed on industries relying on expendable water resources if the true shortage of water were openly acknowledged.

Perhaps it is because the leaders, politicians and diplomats who negotiate issues like this do not want to cause mass hysteria in the region, or in the United States or Western world, by directly addressing the problem of diminishing water supplies. Instead they prefer to keep it their little secret, hidden from public view and accountability, prolonging the inevitable panic and hoarding that will ensue when people's needs will outweigh the planet's capacity for providing potable water.

Perhaps water issues in Iraq and in the Middle East in general do not make the news so as not to legitimize the environmental movement's claims that water is a precious and

ever-diminishing resource that requires drastic reprioritizing on a personal, national and global level. Sustainable practices of water conservation are given cursory attention worldwide and are not yet being implemented on a credible, meaningful scale.

Population growth expectations for the Middle East provide a staggering predicament. According to Michael Klare, author of *Resource Wars*, the regional population was near 500 million in 1998, and that figure is expected to double by the year 2050. There will be no peace in the Middle East without addressing issues of sustainability and access to water. The microcosm of war in the Middle East is a staggering prediction of a potential widespread global crisis if countries do not learn to conserve and cooperate.

Or perhaps it is because resources are not allocated fairly in the region, and acknowledging massive humanitarian crises means that the whistle-blowers are accountable to fixing the problem. Israelis and Palestinians already compete for limited water resources, with Palestine getting short shrift and less water. As noted in *Resource Wars*, Jewish settlers already get five to eight times more water per capita than Palestinians.

Addressing problems of war, famine, the environment, human rights, democracy and sustainability has traditionally been compartmentalized work with little overlap and interdependent relevance. The situation of the marsh Arabs integrates the urgency of ending wars, providing for humanitarian crises and looking ahead into the future at the necessity of sharing natural resources equitably. In the near future, wars may be fought not over intangible ideologies like communism, terrorism or religion, but rather fought overtly about access to clean water. It will soon be much more difficult for governments to euphemize about their intent to wage war.

The policy of rehydrating the marshlands of Iraq is significant in that it marks American interests' recognition of water scarcity in the Middle East. It also means that following the blue lines on the map charts a precarious course toward war or peace, depending on the management of water resources."

Extract from *Water Woes, In Iraq Water and Oil Do Mix*, Leah C. Wells - Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.



Tuesday is red

Did you manage to catch the Reith lectures on Radio 4 this year? Professor Vilayanur Ramachandran of the University of California, San Diego, gave a series of scintillating talks on the latest thinking in neuroscience and illustrated these with some interesting research examples: people blind in one eye being able to point precisely to an object held out of their range of vision, one such woman tried to reach directly for such an object held out of her line of sight through the mirror it was reflected in. The age-old 'problem' of amputees feeling the missing limb - and why this happens; and synesthesia - where people see colours when notes are played, taste shapes, and different days of the week have particular hues:

“...Our insights into the neurological basis of synesthesia could help explain some of the creativity of painters, poets and novelists. According to one study, the condition is seven times as common in creative people as in the general population.

One skill that many creative people share is a facility for using metaphor ("It is the east, and Juliet is the sun"). It is as if their brains are set up to make links between seemingly unrelated domains—such as the sun and a beautiful young woman. In other words, just as synesthesia involves making arbitrary links between seemingly unrelated perceptual entities such as colors and numbers, metaphor involves making links between seemingly unrelated conceptual realms. Perhaps this is not just a coincidence. . .”

There was much more and the question and answer sessions added to an enjoyable experience.

Ramachandran turned up on a Horizon programme on BBC2, discussing the question of whether religious belief is due to neurological features. All those saints and infestations of clerics and sanctimonious opportunists like Blair – seem to be well, in a sense, defective. It's what many of us have long suspected!

Ramachandran (he gets around) also interviewed Noam Chomsky for Frontline India on April 2nd 2003:

“...Ramachandran : Noam, you have seen movements of resistance to imperialism over a long period - Vietnam, Central America, Gulf War I. What are your impressions of the character, sweep and depth of the present resistance to U.S. aggression? We take great heart in the extraordinary mobilisations all over the world.

Chomsky : Oh, that is correct; there is just nothing like it. Opposition throughout the world is enormous and unprecedented, and the same is true of the United States. Yesterday, for example, I was in demonstrations in downtown Boston, right around the Boston Common. It is not the first time I have been there. The first time I participated in a demonstration there at which I was to speak was in October 1965. That was four years after the United States had started bombing South Vietnam. Half of South Vietnam had been destroyed

and the war had been extended to North Vietnam. We could not have a demonstration because it was physically attacked, mostly by students, with the support of the liberal press and radio, who denounced these people who were daring to protest against an American war.

On this occasion, however, there was a massive protest before the war was launched officially and once again on the day it was launched - with no counter-demonstrators. That is a radical difference. And if it were not for the fear factor that I mentioned, there would be much more opposition.

The government knows that it cannot carry out long-term aggression and destruction as in Vietnam because the population will not tolerate it.

There is only one way to fight a war now. First of all, pick a much weaker enemy, one that is defenceless. Then build it up in the propaganda system as either about to commit aggression or as an imminent threat. Next, you need a lightning victory. An important leaked document of the first Bush Administration in 1989 described how the U.S. would have to fight war. It said that the U.S. had to fight much weaker enemies, and that victory must be rapid and decisive, as public support will quickly erode. It is no longer like the 1960s, when a war could be fought for years with no opposition at all.

In many ways, the activism of the 1960s and subsequent years has simply made a lot of the world, including this country, much more civilised in many domains.”

Being afraid of Pete Seeger

Fear is a weapon used by the state continually, with the media acting as conduit. We are all 'afraid' of something, however unwarranted, and these fears are frequently intensified through media disinformation. Fear creates an atmosphere where people do things, not because they are directly ordered to, but for fear of being thought out of step with the wishes of the workplace or national elites controlling our lives.

It is common knowledge that the election-stealing Bush regime wants to drill for oil in the Arctic nature reserves. In order to do this it needs to make a case that the reserves are merely “an area of flat white nothingness” as one of them claimed – much like the inside of Dubya's head. The renowned Smithsonian Institution was holding an exhibition of the work of the photographer Subhankar Banerjee which showed the beauty of this region and made a case for its preservation. The institution decided to move the exhibition to a smaller room and alter the captions accompanying the images because, “Some of the captions bordered on advocacy.” Advocate preservation when there's oil money to be made for your friends? – how underhanded.

So the original caption for an image of the Romanzof Mountains, "The refuge has the most beautiful landscape I have ever seen and is so remote and untamed that many peaks, valleys and lakes are still without names," was changed to "Unnamed Peak, Romanzof Mountains." A caption that included the quotation, "Here there still remain elements of mystery in the unknown which in themselves have great value in the human perception of wilderness" was changed to "Rock lichens." Another caption on the buff-breasted sandpiper said that the species was remarkable because it travelled from Argentina to the Arctic coastal wildlife refuge to nest there. It now said, "Coastal plain of the Jago River and Sandpiper."

A Smithsonian spokesperson said, "There was no pressure whatsoever, either from the White House or anyone else."

As Bruce Jackson says in a *Counter Punch* article:

"I don't think anybody had to call the Smithsonian to tell them to gut the Banerjee show. It doesn't work like that in Washington. It's not that calls aren't made. They're made all the time when someone wants to get something, like having a friend appointed to this or that or wants to be sure a lucrative contract goes to a pal or a big contributor.

But calls don't have to be made when powerful people want to destroy something they don't like. For that to happen, all the powerful people need do is make their position known and the civil servants and bureaucrats further down the line will do the dirty work quite on their own.

That way, whatever happens is indeed just 'routine'."

Grant applications "that received positive recommendations from peer review panels started disappearing somewhere after they left the program directors' desks, after which the program directors and program officers began counseling applicants to stay away from anything political or unpleasant." ". . . Nobody told the peer panels not to vote in favor of proposals with political substance and nobody told the program officers to tell applicants not to develop such applications. No one had to."

In a previous case early 20th Century folk music recordings made onto cylinders were crumbling into carbon dust as the binder used was deteriorating. Money that could have been used to stop this was refused:

". . . Then, some time after that (I don't remember how many; across this expanse of years they telescope), I saw Rae at another meeting. I said, "Rae, [Korson] how come you never told me how to give the Archive the Newport [Folk Foundation] money to save those cylinders?"

"Oh, we couldn't take that money, Bruce."

"You couldn't take it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Pete Seeger was on the Newport board. We just couldn't have taken that money."

"It quite took my breath away. Rae was in charge of protecting those archive holdings, she was the official responsible for finding ways to make the material they had accessible and gathering under the Library's roof material that needed protection, and she had, knowingly, permitted recordings that were unique in all the world turn to powdered carbon because Pete Seeger was on the Newport Folk Foundation board of directors.

The reason Rae was so terrified of Pete Seeger was because in 1956 Pete had refused to provide names to a congressional witch-hunting committee. He had been called because professional informer Harvey Matusow had named him as a communist. Instead of claiming the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination, Pete claimed the First Amendment's protection of freedom of speech. He had nothing to hide about his own acts or beliefs, he said, but he wasn't going to be forced into saying things he didn't think it was right to say. Along with playwright Arthur Miller and seven other people, Pete was cited for contempt by a House vote of 373 to 9. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to a year in prison in 1961. His case was thrown out by US Court of Appeals on technical grounds, but mostly because the whole thing was stupid."

Bruce Jackson ends with these comments:

"I am sure that no one ever told Rae Korson to avoid accepting the Newport check. No one had to. It was just routine. I doubt anyone from the White House called over to the Department of Education last week and told them to scrub their web sites of anything that might controvert White House policy or party line. That purging of uncomfortable information was just routine too. And so was the downgrading of Subhankar Banerjee's Arctic National Wildlife Reserve exhibit and the censoring of his captions.

The Senate oversight committee is going to have a hearing to find the smoking gun in the Banerjee affair. They won't find one. There's no need to find one. In these affairs, no gun is needed. The victims do it all themselves. And the bullets never miss."

Quotes from: "*How Fear Curdles the Soul*", by Bruce Jackson (former chair of the board of trustees of the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, editor of the web magazine *Buffalo Report* and Professor of American Culture at Buffalo University).



Spiders: clever little things, always there weaving those delicate webs come summer or winter.

We're emulating the spider, building social webs strong enough to withstand the buffetings of capitalism. Someone is always there, making the case, arguing the toss. The cry for justice is universal.

Why not help extend the bonds of solidarity?

Holy Shit!

During a discussion on moral absolutes the other morning a question was raised about slavery being acceptable in the Christian holy book. Ah, but slavery in the first century was different to slavery in the 18th C, as one participant approvingly put it, "it was more like the relationship between the modern employer and employee."

Here's someone then who, unwittingly maybe, accepts that capitalism is a form of slavery; that employees are the modern form of an ancient tradition of bondage, and such slavery is as acceptable to some now as it was then.

Church, state and exploiters have always been in each others' beds – with their hands in our pockets.

"God gives nuts to the toothless" - Spanish proverb

Um..because we're different



"A total of 2560 people voted Bristolian on Mayday giving us about an 8% poll in the wards that we stood.

A brand new party making such huge leaps and bounds in such a short space of campaigning is unprecedented! We have listened to you, dear Bristolians, and fear not: we will be back to fight again ..."

– from The Bristolian website.

So participating in the election wasn't a ploy, another exposure of the electoral system. If they are elected in the future will it make a difference? "Getting something done" means compromise with the party apparatus that denies a democracy worthy of the name. Any radical solutions offered to the electorate by The Bristolian Party will go the way of all such. The continual 'promises' of the "Labour" Party makes that clear. The Bristolians might make a fuss in the council chamber but eventually it will be adapt or get out. No lasting purpose will be served apart from legitimising the electoral politics scam.

We thought that people associated with the gadfly Bristolian had a keener sense of history and of the necessity to promote and implement direct action. Seems we got the wrong impression and that the "entryist" strategy of boring from within (and everywhere else), so beloved of those fun-loving trotskyists, has been adopted.

Dirt Poor...

"...Only 1% of GM research is aimed at crops used by poor farmers in poor countries. It can cost up to £200m and 12 years to develop a GM crop, and that cost has to be recouped by selling to farmers who can pay for it.

It is not the interests of poor farmers but the profits of the agrochemical industry that have been the driving force behind the emergence of GM agriculture. Four multinationals - Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer CropScience, and Dupont - now control most of the GM seed market. About 91% of all GM crops grown in the world are from Monsanto seeds.

The report [from Action Aid] says corporations extend their markets by linking herbicides and pesticides to the GM seeds they sell. But yields are no greater and in some cases more chemicals are needed, while the much higher costs could drive poor farmers into debt..." Guardian 28.5.03.

This is simply confirming what many already know. The food problems of the world are largely to do with distribution and the growing of unnecessary cash crops to satisfy the whims of Western palates.

Those who grow what they can and preserve seed are sticking two fingers up to the likes of Monsanto. People are slowly wising up to the way our food is produced and polluted and of the potential for the US to dominate supplies; it takes time but from small acorns etc.

...Filthy Rich

Bath-based crook John Palmer (£300m fortune) is to keep the £33m loot he ripped-off from pensioners and other gullible folk as part of his Tenerife time-share scam. The judges made a "blunder" and "misapplied" the law when confiscating this scumbag's ill-gotten gains. Evidently it all came down to a sentence not containing a phrase describing the intention to recover "more than £10, 000". It's bloody comic innit?

Now, it seems, according to the ass of the law, which, allegedly, is our protector, the decision cannot be appealed. If someone owed the benefits system £33 it is unlikely they'd be given similar largesse.

He wanted to write a story about Santa's little helpers, but it was full of subordinate clauses.

-The Verb R3

Now, we talked to Joan Hanover. She and her husband, George, were visiting with us. They are near retirement—retiring—in the process of retiring, meaning they're very smart, active, capable people who are retirement age and are retiring

**George Walker Bush,
Alexandria, Va., Feb. 12, 2003.**

The Irregular, c/o Box 43, Greenleaf,
82 Colston St. Bristol, BS1 5BB.

Participatory Economics (1)

Those of us who argue against capitalism and for a free society are frequently faced with the question of how things will get done. "Who will do the dirty work" was long a running joke – not heard so much nowadays. The implication being that any system not based on satisfying selfish individual interests would be unsustainable. However it is a simple fact that capitalism is a failure for the majority in every situation. The only interests satisfied are those of the selfish elite, the rest of us (who produce the goods and services) have to make do.

We need to get goods manufactured and distributed and services provided without the fascist-like organisational structures established by corporate production methods. What should replace this undemocratic, exploitative system?

Participatory economics or "Parecon" for short is one answer. It's a method that's been worked on for a number of years now and unsurprisingly it's been completely ignored by the mainstream media. Parecon does not claim to be offering a perfect system – there is no such thing except in the dreams of control freaks – neither is it a blueprint, but it does offer a means to a productive free society gained and sustained by genuinely democratic methods whose values can be understood by anyone.

What are the basic values of parecon?

Solidarity:

"Participatory economics, or Parecon, is...a Solidarity Economy. Its institutions for production, consumption, and allocation don't destroy or obstruct mutuality and sympathy but instead propel even antisocial people into having to address others' well being. To get ahead in a Parecon you have to act on the basis of solidarity.

And this first parecon value is entirely uncontroversial. Only a psychopath would argue that all other things equal, an economy is better if it produces hostility and anti-sociality. Everyone sane will agree that other things equal, an economy is better if it produces solidarity. So we have our first value: Solidarity."

Diversity:

"Capitalist markets homogenize options. They trumpet opportunity but in fact curtail most avenues of satisfaction and development by replacing everything human and caring with only what is most commercial, most profitable, and especially most in accord with the maintenance of domineering power and wealth.

But a Participatory Economy is a Diversity Economy. Parecon's institutions for production, consumption, and allocation not only don't reduce variety, they emphasize finding and respecting diverse channels and solutions to problems. Parecon recognizes that we are finite beings who can benefit from enjoying what others do that we ourselves have no time to do, and also that we are fallible beings who should not vest all our hopes in single channels of advance, instead insuring against damage by trying preserving and exploring diverse avenues and options.

And this value too is entirely uncontroversial. It would require a tremendously perverse individual to argue that all other things equal, an economy is better if it reduces options. Instead, everyone will agree that other things equal, an economy is better if it produces and protects diversity. So we have our second value: Diversity."

Equity:

"Capitalism overwhelmingly rewards property and bargaining power. It says that those who have a deed to productive property by virtue of having that piece of paper and nothing else, deserve profits. And it says that those who have great bargaining power based on anything from monopolizing knowledge or skills, to having better tools or organizational advantages, to being born with special talents, or to being able to command brute force, are entitled to whatever they can take. Capitalism in this respect encapsulates the morality of Al Capone and the Harvard business school—which are, minuscule matters aside, identical. You get what you can take – the rest get leftovers or nothing at all.

But a Participatory Economy is an Equity Economy in that Parecon's institutions for production, consumption, and allocation not only don't destroy or obstruct equity, they propel it. But now a complication arises. What do we mean by equity. And this is controversial.

Parecon of course rejects rewarding property ownership. And it of course it also rejects rewarding power. But what about output? Should people be remunerated for the volume and value of the things they produce? Should we get back from the social product an amount equal to what we produced as part of the social product? It seems equitable...but is it?

Supposing they do the same work for the same length of time at the same intensity, why should someone who has better tools get more income than someone with worse tools? Why should someone who happens to produce something highly valued be rewarded more than someone who produces something less valued, but still socially desired, again if they work the same number of hours and the same intensity at a comparable job vis-à-vis effects on quality of life? Why should someone who was lucky in the genetic lottery, perhaps getting genes for big size, or great strength, or for fast reflexes, or for musical composition talent ... get rewarded more than someone who was less lucky genetically, supposing again that both work in their field at the same intensity and same level of exertion and discomfort?

In a Participatory Economy for those who can work, remuneration is for effort and sacrifice.

If two people go out in the field to harvest some crop and one of them is much stronger, or has better tools, and they both work the same length of time at the same level of exertion under the same sun...then even though the one with better tools has more crop harvested at the end of the day, in a Parecon they get the same pay for their equal effort and sacrifice.

If a great composer produces a masterpiece and a good composer produces only a worthy piece, and they each work for the same duration and under the same conditions, then in a Parecon they get the same pay, even though their outputs are markedly different.

If you work longer, you get more reward. If you work harder, you get more reward. If you work in worse conditions and at more onerous tasks, you get more reward.

But you do not get more reward – higher pay—for having better tools, or for producing something that happens to be more valued, or even for having innate highly productive talents. And regarding their learned skills, people get rewarded for the work involved in learning them, for the effort and sacrifice expended, but not for the ensuing output.

Rewarding only the effort and sacrifice that people expend in their work is controversial. Some anti-capitalists think that people should be rewarded for output, so that a great athlete should earn fortunes, and a comfortable doctor should earn way more than a hard working farmer or short order cook. Parecon rejects that norm. In fact, in a Parecon, if one person had a nice, comfortable, pleasant, highly productive job, and another person had an onerous, debilitating, and less productive but still socially valuable job, the later person would earn more, not the former.

So, we have our third value, a controversial one. We want a good economy to remunerate effort and sacrifice, and, of course, when people can't work, to provide full income anyway. We don't know that we can do this without harsh and offsetting consequences, but if we can attain this type of Equity, then we certainly should want to."

Self-management:

"In capitalism owners or capitalists have tremendous say. Managers, and high level intellectual workers who monopolize daily decision-making levers like lawyers, engineers, financial officers, and doctors, have very substantial say. And some people have virtually zero say. In fact, people doing rote and obedient labor rarely even know what decisions are being made, much less impact them.

Within capitalist firms there is a hierarchy of power that is greater even than that in dictatorships. Stalin himself never dreamed of demanding that the Russian population should have to ask permission to go to the bathroom...a condition that very often prevails for workers in corporations.

But a Participatory Economy is a democratic economy. People control their own lives to appropriate degrees. Each person has a level of say that doesn't impinge on other people having the same level of say. We impact decision in proportion as we are affected by them. This is called Self Management.

Imagine a worker in a large group. He or she wants to place a picture of a daughter on his or her workstation. Who should make that decision? Should some owner decide? Should a manager decide? Should all the workers decide? Obviously, none of that makes sense. The one worker whose child it is should decide, alone, with full authority. He or she should be literally a dictator in this particular case.

Now suppose instead that the same worker wants to put a radio on his or her desk, and to play it very loud, listening to raucous rock and roll or even heavy metal. Now who should decide? We all intuitively know that the answer is that those who will hear the radio should have a say. And that those who will be more bothered – or more benefited – should have more say.

And at this point, we have already arrived at a value vis-à-vis decision making. We don't need a Phd philosopher. We don't need incomprehensible language. We simply realize that we don't want one person one vote and 50% rules all the time. Nor do we always want one person one vote and some other percentage required for agreement. Nor do we always want one person to decide authoritatively, as a dictator. Nor do we always want consensus. Nor do we always want any other single approach. All these methods of making decisions make sense in some cases, but they are horrible in other cases.

What we hope to accomplish when we choose a mode of decision making as well as associated processes of discussion, agenda setting, and so on, is that each actor should have an influence on decisions in proportion to the degree they are affected by them.

The logic is actually quite simple. If we don't all have a say in decisions in proportion as we are affected by them, then some people will have a say more than they are affected and other people will have a say less than they are affected, but there is no moral basis for such a differential, nor even an argument on grounds of reaching the best decisions. Expertise is certainly essential to arriving at good decisions – that is, to generate and provide information bearing on decisions. And yes, expertise also plays a role when we get to actually registering our preferences, because, in fact, we are each the world's foremost expert on our own preferences, so we each be responsible for our expressing them. And so we have our fourth value...Self Management."

"...In a Participatory Economy we want to be Efficient.

Does the word induce a bit of nausea in some of you? It does in me. But we need to get over that, because efficiency really means seeking to attain our aims and in doing so not wasting things we value. We should all therefore favor efficiency. The alternative to favoring efficiency is to favor either not attaining our aims, or to favor wasting things that we value.

So why does the word induce some nausea? In capitalism owners preference become the sought after ends, and what owners value is not wasted. So in capitalism efficiency means seeking maximum profits while reproducing the conditions of profit-making without wasting assets that owners can exploit. Capitalists don't mind destroying humans with black lung disease, or exterminating humans with weapons or with hunger, when the people afflicted are expendable as far as profit is concerned. Capitalists don't mind sickening people in the wake of their workplaces' pollution. They don't mind blowing up or destroying assets that they themselves can't exploit, though others will suffer from the loss. Under capitalism being efficient means being vile, because it is a vile system – and this is why we have some antipathy to the word efficiency as it is used all around us.

But in a parecon being efficient means producing, consuming, and allocating to meet needs and to develop potentials consistent with expanding solidarity, diversity, equity, and self-management. And it means not wasting anything that we can enjoy and benefit from. So, a Parecon should be efficient, in this precise sense, of course..."

(quotes from a talk given by Michael Albert at a meeting in Port Alegre, Brazil, January 2003).