

# Fatuous Turgid Toads



Jan  
Gunn  
1972  
WITH APOLOGIES TO  
E.H. SHEPARD

# FTT 14

NOVEMBER 1992

FTT is a science fiction fanzine which like most such never mentions the stuff at all, and is principally concerned with history, politics and travel. It is available for any of the following:

- (a) your own publication in exchange (we trade all-for-all);
- (b) a letter of comment on this or previous issues;
- (c) an appropriate contribution for future issues; or
- (d) £1 in coin or stamps.

Since we prefer an active to a passive readership, we'd ask that the fourth of these options be adopted only by those who have no time for the first three. Those who have failed to respond by any of the above four means to the previous three issues will find a cryptic notation of obscure yet doom-laden portent in the margin adjacent to this paragraph; let them cogitate appropriately upon its meaning!

All responses should be addressed to:

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The contents of this slimmer-than-usual issue are as follows:

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The cover illustration is by Ian Gunn, based on an original by one of his favourite illustrators, and intended to depict any smarmy politician of your choice. The other illustrations are derived from the following sources: *The Guardian* (pages 4, 6, 13, 18, 22), *New Internationalist* (page 9), *NPC Newsletter* (page 20), *Surveyor* (page 16). The Trade Game on page 9 is adapted from the Winter 1992 issue of *Oxfam News*.

This fanzine supports Abi Frost for TAFF, and we think you should too (or we'll rip your bloody arms off).

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## WOBBLY BITS HALL OF SHAME

Readers will recall our consistent requests that responses to this fanzine should be addressed to both editors. Some readers, however, have just as consistently failed to heed these requests. In issue 12, therefore, we warned that such continued failure would result in their being publicly pilloried in a special "Hall of Shame", as an example to the others; and by God if some people *still* didn't pay attention.

Our first individual is someone who has been principally responsible for these repeated warnings, and indeed for the eventual creation of this section -- someone who has persisted in addressing his responses solely to Joseph despite having been told in as many words, in several postcards, that he should address us both. Step forward and be recognised, then,

MATTHIAS HOFMANN

Perhaps seeing his name here will finally force him to pay heed. Others who also need to get the message are MARTIN GITTINS and IAN SORENSEN. All men, you'll note. We hope that their wobbly bits are appropriately shrivelled with guilt!

# THE CON OF THE MARKET

Judith Hanna

Walthamstow High Street on Saturdays is a mile or so of stalls, most with brightly coloured awnings where fruit and veg, cheap and cheerful clothes and household bits and pieces, dangly earrings and all sorts of bits and bobs are on sale. It's been packed every time we've been there, so you push your way through a press of people. The stallholders chide and call you "darling", which is not my favourite term of address from strangers but no offence meant you know, luv. Round the corner from our flat in Pimlico was a smaller, quieter all-week market: half a dozen fruit and vegetable stalls, another selling farm fresh eggs and poultry, and a couple with cheap jigsaws, clothing and oddments. I used to buy our fruit and veg there, as did most locals. Market fruit just has so much more character than supermarket stuff.

Just about every little town around Britain seems to have its market, some in purpose-built Victorian or Georgian market halls, others out in the open in market squares. In Europe, too, we found little stalls with giant cheeses, tulip bulbs and dinky souvenirs lining the canals of Utrecht, little stalls in the market squares of Haarlem and Delft, buskers and scenic sketches along Charles Bridge in Prague. The markets are where you feel the liveliest pulse of modern, as of medieval, towns. The high streets are becoming sterile, taken over by mass-market chains, so that from town to town the same trademarks, the same fascia boards march along. When you can buy Benetton or C & A from Italy to Sweden, you might as well be at home. But every market has its own character.

In the USA, Seattle's Pike Place waterside market is one of the most memorable, a small-rubbery-sea-creature-eater's-heaven, with its massed ranks of geoducks (pronounced gooey-ducks, a sort of clam with a neck, resembling "penis on the half-shell"), salmon and oysters at wonderfully cheap prices rubbing shoulders with the red and black stylised beasties of Pacific Coast Indian art. In Australia, Sydney's Paddy's Market was a regular Saturday jaunt, another seafood heaven where you could buy your own glistening calamari to fry up at home in beer batter, and browse through tie-dyed, oriental, hand-made cane bits of this and that before stopping off for dim-sum in Chinatown next door. Free market, as Fremantle's is universally known, is equally the place to go for a Saturday out boosting the local economy. Then there were the bazaars of what was then Soviet Central Asia: truckloads of potatoes, onions and watermelon, old women with walnut brown faces and gold teeth flashing behind pyramids of almost fluorescently bright lemons and tomatoes and pomegranates, and tiny violet-mauve doves with delicate coral feet paddling through the stalls.

"The market" is a colourful plethora of small traders, a social occasion as much as economic transactions. Back when Adam Smith was writing, that's the market he had in mind. But these days, when economists talk about "the free market" and "market forces" what they are doing is hi-jacking that colourful, lively connotation in the service of Coca Cola Corporation, Rio Tinto Zinc, Shell Oil -- vast transnational corporations which have little in common with small local businesses. The term "market economy" is being used as a con job, to justify policies which squeeze the little businesses making up local economies in favour of global capital. Real markets are human scale; but humans are redundant to "free market economics".

At university, I found economics lectures and textbooks unparalleled as soporifics. What sunk in between falling asleep over them served the useful purpose of making me very dubious about economists and all their works. The important thing about economics, as about statistics, is to know enough of how they work to be confident in challenging them.

It was easy enough to accept the logic of supply and demand curves intersecting at the "market price" people would be willing to pay, *ceteris paribus*, which translates

as "all things being equal" -- except that the other courses I was doing, in politics, psychology and anthropology, were all about the fascinating and complex ways that things never are equal. Advertising is one simple example -- a technique for artificially boosting demand. Effective market choice depends on perfect information, even in theory. In the real world, what you buy depends on what's to hand, your mood, and a rag-bag of prejudices which may range from memory of an ad to whether you're avoiding South African produce, boycotting Nestle for their baby milk activities, or want a package that won't clash with the curtains. (It is worth noting that many advertisers believe that an ad which, by irritating, lodges in the mind is more effective at getting people to pick up their product than an unmemorably inoffensive ad.)

The other points which sank in as ludicrous were to do with measuring the success of national economies. An economy in "equilibrium" had a steady rate of growth; economic "growth" was accelerating growth. Economic assessments, then, are predicated not on remaining reasonably well-off but on getting more and more. Even then, back in the seventies, it was clear that on a finite planet being exploited pretty well to capacity, continuing growth could only be at the expense of fair shares for others. Or by inflation.

The national measures, of Gross National Product and Gross Domestic Product, used to assess growth, too, were clearly flawed. They measure not what is produced, but money changing hands. So acquiring something and selling it counted as twice as good as acquiring something and keeping it to use. Moreover, anything you made yourself instead of buying didn't count at all. As far as economics is concerned, women at home don't work -- they may grow all the family's vegetables, make all the family's clothes, paint the house, do the accounts, but that production isn't real because no money changes hands. Pay someone else for any of these things, however, and the work pops into existence in the measurable economy. Nor do GDP or GNP take into account that if you are earning more, but have to pay out more in higher prices, then a bigger GDP or GNP doesn't actually say anything about whether you're better off.

## THE STERLING CRISIS: TWO SIMPLE REMEDIES

① Prevail upon the BUNDESBANK to KICK-START Europe's post-communist economies and SHADOW the Polish ZLOTY and Bulgarian LEV through realignment of the DM within (and out of the BOTTOM OF) the ERM. Thus are the Krauts regally screwed and the QUID is QUEEN of CURRENCIES. Alternatively...

② Deliver a DOUBLE WHAMMY to SPECULATION and AGEISM by loading all the FOREIGN EXCHANGE DEALERS into tumbrils and replacing them with mature, experienced, under-valued and wise OLD FOLK. Thus will INTERNATIONAL CAPITALISM grind to a gentle halt in a matter of DAYS...





The one point which sank in as worthwhile was the distinction between the "real economy" of goods and services, while the "money economy", by implication, had to be unreal. With this distinction in mind, I was never able to take monetarism seriously. How could a theory which focused so narrowly on the unreal, money economy keep the real world of production and consumption on the rails? In the UK at least, the warnings that short-term financial speculation was soaking up money needed for long-term investment and R&D began a decade ago, though the slump produced came home to roost just a year or so back.

Meanwhile, anthropology was throwing up some other ways of looking at the place of money, or exchange systems, in life. Not just barter systems, North West Coast Amerindian potlatch, Niugini big man and cargo cults. In Western Ireland, apparently, it was an insult to settle all your debts with a neighbour or local shop -- it showed you did not trust them, were unwilling to be beholden to them. Maintaining a running credit/debit balance was part of the social texture, of being part of the local economy. To pay cold cash down was to treat someone like a stranger, a mere transaction. Another intriguing insight comes from a mention in a recent *Anthropology Today* that a study of Tashkent market found that vastly more transactions were between traders within the market than with customers from outside.

In the last few years, I've been getting involved with the New Economics Foundation, which pulls together a range of social and environmental challenges to economic orthodoxy. They've been most visible as organisers of "The Other Economic Summit" conferences, held at the same time and in the same city as G7 summit meetings. Since they bring together economists who have come up with alternatives to the various unrealities of traditional theory, it's hardly surprising that it's mainly from NEF material I've been able to pick out what seem sensible remedies for various rampant economic delusions. Many of them hinge around getting back to the human and local scale of real, lively markets. Basic to NEF's position is Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* principle of "economics with a human face".

1. National accounts need to include a statement of net environmental capital assets, just as business accounts normally show the state of capital assets. If turnover or profit have been achieved at the expense of selling off capital, or not making good depreciation, the balance sheet is not healthy, and auditors and shareholders are likely to ask questions. For instance, a World Resources Institute study shows that if Indonesia's GDP were recalculated to allow for the loss or degradation of oil, forest, and soil resources, then growth falls from 7.1% to 4%; if other assets (fish, natural gas, tin, and copper) are included, growth is negative.

Again, it has been calculated that a hectare of tropical rainforest produces edible fruits and latex worth US\$6330 a year; if cleared for cattle pasture, it will produce beef worth US\$2960 for a couple of years, before soil fertility is exhausted; if replaced with fast-growing tree plantations, the timber cut after five years or so will be worth US\$3184. Although these valuations show the land to be most economically productive when left as rainforest, and harvested sustainably, the pressure is for the forest to be cut down for cattle pasture since the timber can then be exported for foreign exchange, which accrues to a big, often transnational firm. The transaction bulks big in GDP -- while subsistence and small-scale sales of fruits, etc, in local markets are difficult to monitor, and so ignored. The Philippines rainforest is now nearly logged out because only the one-off income from logging was counted in the national accounts, but not the long-term loss of the forest as natural resource base. The account was recently further complicated, of course, by the disastrous mud-slide down a deforested slope which no longer stabilised the soil, which killed over 300 people. In the UK, a life lost in a road crash is valued at £700,000: what figure should cost-benefit analysis put on this unnatural disaster caused by logging?

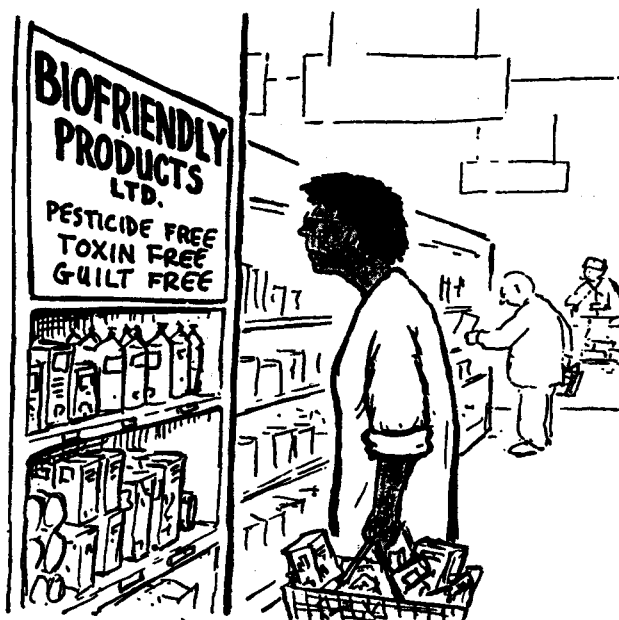
GDP should also differentiate between positive transactions, stemming from useful production and services, and negative transactions which represent payments for

making good pollution or environmental damage. The millions spent cleaning up after the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska, for instance, all count towards GDP growth, though they might more rationally be regarded as an economic penalty rather than a contribution to growth.

2. The national money movement (GDP) indicator needs to be balanced by a range of social "value for money" indicators. If GDP growth is just benefiting a privileged few, then the overall economic picture is not healthy. For instance, the USA is the world's richest nation, but ranks 18th in the world on infant mortality; and has 32 million people (1/8th of the population) officially classed below the poverty line, with one fifth of its children living in poverty -- twice the child poverty rate of Canada, Sweden, or Germany. Not unrelated to this is the fact that military spending -- which is unproductive in real terms -- exceeds education.

The indicators most commonly suggested as measures of real socio-economic performance are infant mortality rate, literacy rate, distribution of income or wealth, and average life expectancies. Disaggregating each of these to show whether there are differences between male and female rates, or between different racial or cultural groups, gives a further check of social justice. The set of 16 key human and environmental indicators drawn up by Victor Anderson for NEF includes adult female literacy, people lacking access to safe drinking water, babies and children dying before the age of five, and average annual rate of deforestation. I have reservations about this last: the only reason many European countries are likely to score well on it is that they logged out their own forests a century or more ago.

3. Valuing unpaid work in monetary terms isn't easy. Nor is it easy to assign monetary values to environmental values or to a range of social factors. The latter point means that cost-benefit analysis can only ever be an imperfect tool for deciding whether a project, for instance the Narmada dam in India, or a road across Twyford Down or Oxleas Wood, will deliver a net economic value. Better to set concrete objectives: in transport, carbon dioxide emissions reduction target, air quality levels, one-third fewer road casualties by the end of the century, no species to be tipped to extinction. The "alternative indicators" mentioned above could well be used in this way. They allow not just comparisons of levels of well-being or socio-economic performance, but can be used to measure progress towards (or away from) tolerable or even comfortable standards.



4. Some of the most intriguing economic experiments being tried out in various places are alternative currency systems. Some are called "green dollar" systems, some called "LETS" (for Local Exchange Transaction System). The basic idea is to give people in areas starved for hard currency a system of units of local exchange which

can be earned and paid within their community.

At one level, local governments can issue their own currencies, or bonds, to employees and contractors, and accept them in payment of their bills. This enabled Argentina's Salta Province to decouple itself from galloping national inflation and keep needed public works (hospitals, garbage collection, new bridge construction) going without having to wait for Buenos Aires to release funds. At the same time, circulation of this currency allowed ordinary people to get on with everyday food-buying, rent payments and exchanges of goods and services, insulated from the insanities of the "real" money, which could be kept for transactions with outside-based organisations. At present, the provincial bonds account for 60% of the currency in circulation in Salta province, and the experiment has been imitated by the three neighbouring provinces of La Rioja, Jujuy and Tucuman.

According to recent NEF newsletters, the first such alternative exchange system was philanthropist Robert Owen's Labour Exchange experiment in the last century. This was followed by Worgl's town money in Austria in the 1930s, the Useful Services Exchange in the US in the 1960s, the Community Exchange in Vancouver in 1976, and the Widget Exchange on Vancouver Island in 1979 -- which evolved into the first explicitly named Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS) in 1983. New Zealand apparently has about 40 "green dollar" schemes operating since depression struck in 1987, with a national *Green Dollar Quarterly* newsletter used not only to exchange practical information but also to co-ordinate lobbying of the mainstream government on tax and social security rules in relation to "green dollars". There are about 35 UK LETS schemes in operation, the biggest in Stroud. Is anyone out there involved in one?

Basically, money is simply a medium of exchange which allows networks or chains of transactions rather than the simple one-to-one swap of straight barter. It has no value in itself, as inflation shows; its value is simply what people agree to exchange for it. As such, LETS prices and money prices can rub alongside each other. The value of a LETS unit is often defined in terms of "one hour basic work", rather than in terms of equivalence with currency. But since agreeing a transaction creates a LETS credit in someone's account, at the same time creating an equivalent LETS debit in the other party's account, the net value within a LETS system should always be zero. That is, it doesn't allow accumulation of wealth and the power that goes with it. Unused LETS credit does nothing -- LETS values exist only as exchange transactions. Nor can you charge interest on LETS units -- what is there to lend? Questions about how LETS should relate to the tax system are floating about, so far unanswered: it will be a while before LETS grows widespread enough for the tax system to take notice.

The attraction of LETS schemes is that where a large section of a local community are excluded from the money economy through unemployment, LETS creates an exchange system that unlocks the earning power of people's time and skills. The initial resource needed is a group of interested people, one of whom can act as co-ordinator. It helps if the co-ordinator has a computer. The co-ordinator keeps track of credits and debits run up by members. They, or another team member, usually produce a list of skills or goods on offer within the system: a sample list includes baking cakes, aromatherapy, car mechanics, organic vegetable growing, child-minding, granny-sitting, hair-dressing, bicycle delivery service, dog-walking, book-keeping, knitting and crochet, pottery, guitar lessons, doctor, dentist, clown, painting and decorating, general labourer, general help, dressmaking, and shoe repair. You may have no money, but LETS allows you to buy what's on offer within the local community, in exchange for your own skills. The more who become involved, the more needs can be met through LETS exchange, and the less need for real money. And the more self-reliant the local economy, the less at the mercy of an uncaring head office in London, Tokyo, Frankfurt or New York. Too utopian, or simply applied common sense?

One question which is being addressed is whether credits in one LETS system should be exchangeable in other LETS systems. The consensus seems to be that they should not. People can be members of more than one LETS exchange -- but in each system,

their credit balance should reflect only their transactions within that system. This doesn't prevent me, for instance, from agreeing to pay you my 40 LETS credits in the system here in exchange for you swapping to me an agreed equivalent number of credits in your local system. But the transactions are between individuals, and don't amount to a general exchange rate for the LETS currency as a whole, nor would they allow the whole balance of an account to be moved from one system to another. The balance of each LETS system remains zero; neither LETS currency owes the other anything. Thus though nothing prevents you trading out goods or services, you can't export profits from a LETS system.

It's a disarmingly simple little system. It doesn't tackle or solve the problems of international capital, with its trails of more zeros than you can picture, sloshing about a cyberspace in which humans have become just about obsolete. (Ninety percent of international exchange transactions are currency speculation, buying and selling to gain on exchange rate fluctuations; only ten percent are to do with trade.) What it does is step back into the real, human world of local markets and get down to oiling rusted up channels of exchange of skills, time, intelligence and the basics of life for those who've fallen out of the money economy. Eric Frank Russell, back in the forties or fifties, wrote a neat little story about a Gandhian planet of "myob" and "yourob" -- the LETS systems are putting that simple socio-economic insight to work.

Is it too simple, too small-scale? Seems to me that it is at the small-scale that working solutions are being found. Face up to the global scale and all you do is beat your head against an armoured, apparently unstoppable behemoth which doesn't even notice. But working on one, then another, specific project or problem, you find more and more patches of hope and success. As they say: think globally, act locally. Paul Harrison's *The Greening Of Africa* gives the best picture I've come across of how community agro-forestry initiatives can make fertile semi-desert and worn-out lands. He stresses that giving the local people, including women, control and ownership of the products of their labour and local land and water resources is the key factor in successful schemes.

This seems to apply equally to saving rainforests, or endangered wild animals. Zimbabwe, and Richard Leakey in Kenya, have seen giving local villages a share of tourist enterprises -- not just low-paid jobs and selling cheap souvenirs -- as necessary if they are to see the point of keeping alive pesky large animals that trample or eat their crops, and in the case of lions, sometimes eat them. Australian farmers feel the same way about kangaroos. In the Amazon, various organisations are working on sustainable harvests from forest resources owned by local Indians, as a way of showing that rainforest has an economic value at least equal to hamburger-cattle rangeland -- but such export-directed endeavours still leave out the values accruing through subsistence and non-money exchanges among local people.

Far from economic development being trickle-down from big investment, the best hope seems to be for trickle-up from a myriad of small-scale solutions, whether in developed urban or less developed countries.

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"JN also claims I called him a communist apologist, which in fact I never did. Then, noting that he had been referred to as the moral equal of Philby, Burgess and MacLean, he takes this as an accusation that he spied for the Soviets (as they did). Apparently he is unaware that being a moral equal doesn't mean doing the same thing, merely something equivalent morally. However, if JN insists he is not the moral equal of Philby, Burgess and MacLean, I will be happy to take him at his word."

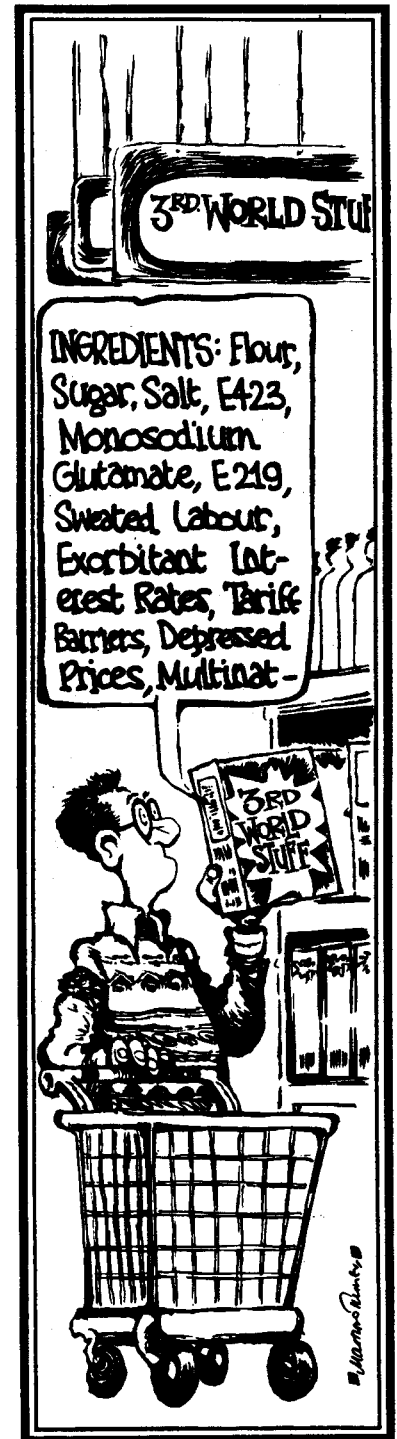
Thus Timothy Lane in *Fosfax* 161, responding to Joseph's comments about his Cold War world view in the previous *FTT* -- and failing to comprehend that the charge of "moral equivalence" is so preposterous that defending it only makes him look ridiculous. He also claims that we didn't send *Fosfax* a copy of that issue, which we certainly did, since we believe that people should always be shown what's published about them -- a courtesy presumably not shared by Timothy Lane, who despite several requests has still to forward a copy of his comments on the censored letter of Joseph's that he's otherwise making available to anyone else who asks.



# THE TRADE GAME

A Game Every Developing Country Must Play

<p><b>START</b></p> <p>↓</p>	<p><b>Rule One: Stall 'Em</b> UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) was established in 1962 to promote international trade with a principal focus on the problems of developing nations, but hasn't achieved much. Its 18th meeting, in 1992, agreed to settle for a research and advisory role.</p>		<p><b>17</b> The EC's beet sugar exports, subsidised by the CAP, undermine your sugar exports, leading to low prices - go back one square</p>	<p><b>18</b> Whatever you do, the rules seem to be against you - join GATT to try to change the rules (See Rule Five)</p>	<p><b>19</b> GATT is dominated by the North - go back to square one</p>
<p><b>1</b> You are a poor country in the South and you want to develop</p>	<p><b>Rule Two: Lucky For Some</b> The Lomé Convention regulates trade between the EC and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries. It gives ACP countries preferential access to the EC market, and protection against falling commodity prices.</p>		<p><b>16</b> Northern countries impose textile quotas under the MFA - go back one square (See Rule Four)</p>		
<p><b>2</b> Northern experts advise you to increase exports of your main commodity to bring in more money</p>	<p><b>Rule Three: Overproduce And Undercut</b> The EC's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidises production by European farmers and, when that results in surpluses, subsidises exports.</p>		<p><b>15</b> Go into textile manufacturing, taking a lead from Taiwan and Korea - go forward one square</p>		
<p><b>3</b> Other countries do the same, and the price collapses - go back to square one</p>	<p><b>Rule Four: Stitch Up The South</b> The Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) protects Northern textile industries from cheaper Southern imports. Under the MFA, Northern countries impose quotas on Southern textile producers, but not on other Northern producers. The MFA has been "temporary" since 1974.</p>		<p><b>14</b> Get a new expert from the North to advise you - go forward one square</p>		
<p><b>4</b> Diversify into other commodities to spread the risk - go forward one square</p>	<p><b>Rule Five: Make More Rules</b> The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), formed in 1947, regulates world trade. It aims to stimulate trade by reducing tariffs and other trade barriers. Seven rounds of negotiations have reduced tariffs, but it is trade between the countries of the North that has grown fastest. Trade between North and South has grown slowly, while protectionist measures by the North, such as the MFA, have increased.</p>		<p><b>13</b> Heavy rain washes soil from the hillsides and causes floods - go back two squares</p>		
<p><b>5</b> Maybe there's strength in numbers - join UNCTAD (See Rule One)</p>	<p><b>Rule Six: Make More Rules</b> The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), formed in 1947, regulates world trade. It aims to stimulate trade by reducing tariffs and other trade barriers. Seven rounds of negotiations have reduced tariffs, but it is trade between the countries of the North that has grown fastest. Trade between North and South has grown slowly, while protectionist measures by the North, such as the MFA, have increased.</p>		<p><b>12</b> Northern experts advise you to clear forested hillsides, sell timber, and plant cash crops - go forward one square</p>		
<p><b>6</b> Flooding destroys rival producers' crops, and prices rise - go forward one square</p>	<p><b>Rule Seven: Make More Rules</b> The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), formed in 1947, regulates world trade. It aims to stimulate trade by reducing tariffs and other trade barriers. Seven rounds of negotiations have reduced tariffs, but it is trade between the countries of the North that has grown fastest. Trade between North and South has grown slowly, while protectionist measures by the North, such as the MFA, have increased.</p>		<p><b>11</b> The North imposes escalating tariffs, charging more for processed goods than raw materials - go back two squares</p>		
<p><b>7</b> As a former European colony you may be eligible to join Lomé - go forward two squares (See Rule Two)</p>	<p><b>8</b> Cheap grain from the EC floods your markets; urban buyers are happy - go forward one square</p>	<p><b>9</b> Ruined by low grain prices, farmers abandon the land to seek work in the cities - go back two squares (See Rule Three)</p>	<p><b>10</b> Try to add value to your commodity exports by doing some of the processing yourself - go forward one square</p>		



# STRUCTURALISM AND THE UNARMED ORNITHOPTER

*Leigh Edmonds*

It has been some time since you had a report from Orrite Ornithopter Production Systems (OOPS), undisputed world leaders in the design and construction of ornithopters. We could offer you many reasons for this delay, ranging from almost boastful claims about the extraordinary expansion of our balsa boat-building subsidiary to the sad story of our Chief Designer and the Albanian weight-lifter/gourmet chef or, dare I even mention it, recent financial problems related to offshore investments. To be open and honest about it, we'd rather not dwell on the real reason for the lack of a report. But, anyhow....

The problem basically came about because, when we were looking around for a new Chief Designer, we asked our employment consultants to find us a "structural engineer" and they found us a "structuralist". The man (his lawyers have allowed us to be that specific in identifying him) is actually a leader in his field, highly respected in learned circles, with impressive recommendations from around the globe. Say his name in any learned discourse and people will nod approvingly, or so they tell us. On paper he looked a real find, and in person he has an overpowering presence, which is probably why we didn't find out that he knew nothing about advanced ornithopter designs until we had signed the three year contract with him. Of course, it was not really his fault either; a man of such profound philosophical development has to be forgiven for making the simple mistake of sending an application to an aerospace manufacturer rather than a world-leading university (this sentence has been included at the express wish of our lawyers).

Later we discovered the truth. The most advanced thing that this eminent person knew about aviation was how to get his secretary to book a ticket on an airline. The OOPS Board thought about this long and hard, saw the amount that this man was being paid monthly and how much it would cost to pay him off early. Baulking at this, they considered, for a short time at least, that it would be cheaper to create a school of advanced philosophical concepts in the old paint shed at the back of the main hangar to bring in some revenue from the outlay in hiring him. Things would have been all right if that had happened. The trouble was that our man is very persuasive, and somehow convinced the Board that what they needed was a multidisciplinary approach to aerospace design. He gave us a long speech in which he argued that the material world could only be understood in terms of philosophic concepts, and so the way ahead for technology was to take advantage of this to develop new products along proven philosophical lines of argument. He said he specialised in the concept of "binary opposites", and that there was nothing more appropriate to the development of entirely new ideas in ornithopter development than the application of this philosophical concept. It was one of those speeches, you have probably heard them too, which seems to be profoundly important, but when you come to think about it later you can't quite put your finger on the reason why.

At the end of his speech the overwhelmed Board voted that the man's remuneration be increased by one Rolls Royce and two secretaries annually, that a special Bureau of Advanced Philosophical Design be created for him to head, and that a new chief designer be appointed. We gave much more specific instructions to a different employment consultant, and ended up with a very well credentialed man from the old Soviet Union who, it turned out, had spent his entire life working on helicopters. He had some trouble in coming to terms with the idea of wings that go up and down

rather than round in circles.

As the head of the Bureau of Advanced Philosophical design, our structuralist set to work developing a new conceptual basis for aviation design. As part of his research, he travelled to most of the important libraries of the western world and attended some extremely high-powered conferences at some exclusive and expensive locations. At the end of two years, he produced a five hundred page report which, according to reviews in the philosophical journals, has completely reshaped our thinking about the nature of reality and technical design. The executive summary, a much more comprehensible document, provided a very persuasive argument that aviation and structuralist thought are strongly intertwined. It proved that aviation depends on the concept of "binary opposites" for its very existence for, after all, what are the primary realities of aeronautical design problems if they are not opposites. To begin with, there is the equation of lift opposing weight and drag opposing thrust -- problems which go back to the classical age of aeronautical philosophy with Da Vinci and others. The executive summary then went on to demonstrate more recent and more complex concepts, such as aeroplane range opposing payload, and maintenance hours opposing company profits. More importantly, it showed that ornithopters are the only true philosophical demonstrations of aviation because they are the only true physical and observable embodiment of these necessary binary opposites. The argument is simplicity itself if you stop to think about it....

We at OOPS were impressed. Never before had our modest achievements been exposed to so much international interest. Moreover, there were profits in it. We had to convert our balsa boat-building factory to making model ornithopters to meet the demand from structuralists around the world. They apparently used these models to prove their arguments in philosophy lectures on structuralist thought, and this led to a brief revival in the popularity of structuralism. Later, we heard that it had also led to an equally brief increase in the number of university students admitted to hospital -- we never bothered to enquire whether these were casualty ward or psychiatric ward admissions.

Things may have been fine if matters had rested there. We had made a small profit and enhanced our reputation on the world stage, although admittedly not in the field we would have chosen. Unfortunately, Victor, our new chief designer, considered himself a bit of a philosopher and was not content to read the executive summary of the report; he read the main text in full and minute detail. He then formed something of a close friendship with the head of our Bureau of Advanced Philosophical Design, which led to troubles of a different and less philosophical nature.

Victor's first prototype had been a bit of a worry. It resembled a standard helicopter body, with the wings attached to a pole protruding from the top. He said that this solved the problem of the wings striking the ground on the downstroke. "Good thinking, Victor," we said, and hoped for the best. It turns out, however, that a pole which is strong enough to hold helicopter blades which only have to whirl around is not strong enough for the stress of flapping wings and, after a couple of minutes of pre-flight testing, the wings detached themselves and bounded across the ground for some distance before coming to an electrifying end in the nearby power lines. Fortunately, they just missed the entertainment tent.

Victor, who was in the entertainment tent at the time, was visibly shaken by this failure, and begged for another chance. He said that he had recently discovered a revolutionary principle which was guaranteed to produce phenomenal results and that it would be the basis of his next design. The Board of OOPS, which had been in the entertainment tent for some time before the trial had commenced, merrily agreed with this new proposal.

The next design was constructed in high secrecy and proved startling when it was rolled out of the OOPS hangar. Instead of one set of wings, it had four on each side. The whole lot were powered by what appeared to be the remains of an extremely large steam locomotive. The energy from this engine was translated into thrust for

the wings through a series of highly robust pistons and levers, the like of which had not been seen since the time of Brunel. Computer simulations had demonstrated that the energy from this engine could easily lift the ornithopter, enough coal for two hours' flight and one hundred passengers, so we were not unduly worried about our investment. Unfortunately, we had not counted upon the philosophy of binary opposites, and Victor had designed the operation of the wings so that while two were on their downstroke two were doing the opposite. The result of this carefully balanced operation of opposing forces was that, despite boiler-splitting efforts, the contraption did not move an inch and in fact barely vibrated despite the enormous energies that were being generated. Talk about sound and fury achieving nothing... The novelty was so great that we established the OOPS Carnival Entertainments subsidiary which is now touring the country with this prototype, making quite useful profits with its demonstration of various philosophical principles and keeping people cool in summer with its gale force wings.

We explained to Victor that while we were not entirely unhappy with his efforts, we were in the business of making flying machines. It would be a good thing if he could design one for us. By this time, Victor and our philosopher had had something of a falling out over an obscure philosophical point which apparently arose from writings in *Aviation Week & Space Technology* magazine about the idea of inherent instability. The idea is that if you make a flying machine inherently unstable and use computers to keep it stable in the air you get a much more manoeuvrable aeroplane. No doubt you can imagine the implications that this technological application has for structuralist philosophy.

The outcome of this debate was what Victor called an "augmented binary opposition inherently unstable" ornithopter. By this stage he was thinking really big: three boilers, four hundred passengers, and thirteen wings to flap at random under the control of a new generation computer. It looked a bit expensive to build and, to be honest, we did not have much faith in it. Fortunately, we ordered a smaller test bed instead, with five wings, a pilot, and an engine from a sedan car. (We later learned that Victor "borrowed" the engine from the philosopher's second Rolls Royce.)

The finished product looked pretty interesting actually, with a combination of modern ideas, light-weight cane and canvas structural elements where possible, and the usual polished metal connecting rods and well oiled pistons and shafts. A passing observer was heard to say that it looked very post-modern, but happily we didn't know what that meant.

Unhappily, the engine was not strong enough to give the ornithopter enough power to climb so we had to hire a hot air balloon to lift the machine into the air. The idea was that when it reached a sufficient altitude the pilot would climb down into the ornithopter, set the wings flapping and then, when everything was working properly, it would fly away. Just to be on the safe side, we planned to test the ornithopter over the broad expanse of the Swan River where nothing would get damaged if there was an accident. Everything was set on the big day; the press was out in force to report and people were out on the streets to witness the great trial. The event had what they call a high public profile. The trouble was that nobody had told us that an IBM PC is not big enough to control the gyrations of an unstable ornithopter. What was worse, the wind was blowing from the river towards Perth.

If you've been to the Myer store in the centre of Perth, the big one opposite the Post Office, you will have seen that it has a huge open space in the middle, going right from the basement to the top floor and capped with a magnificent glass roof to let in the sunlight. When that glass roof is demolished by the frantically flapping wings of an unstable and out of control ornithopter it allows in more than the weather. It allows in the ornithopter as well.

Let's see, there is the manchester department, which is full of sheets, towels and other kinds of fabric. What about the dinnerware department, full of delightful, expensive and fragile crockery and glassware? If we had been lucky, some of the

flimsy garments from the women's lingerie department might have clogged up the engine or jammed the pistons and other moving parts, but the workmanship of those parts of the ornithopter was impeccable, and it did not stop.

When the rogue machine fell over the railings of one level and toppled down to the bedding department, it put paid to two dozen beds. Most of them were ordinary sprung mattresses, but the suddenly unleashed energy of a mattress of bedsprings is something to behold while half a dozen waterbeds hold more water than you would imagine. Need I say more? By the time the machine toppled into the basement, four of its wings were still flailing efficiently, the fifth having been caught under a fallen family size refrigerator (we thought that this had pinned the machine down, but after a minute or two the main spar broke under the strain). It hopped around among the books, records and tapes, get-well cards and computing equipment for some time while the survivors above looked on from their now safe vantage points. The machine looked like going on for ever until it drummed its way into the food department and was extinguished by a bowl of fruit salad in the air intake and short circuited by the ruptured soda fountain.

So that's the reason why there hasn't been a report from OOPS for some time. No, we haven't been trying to pay off the debt to Myer by working behind the counters in the evenings, nor have we been hiding in South America. There was one rumour that we were spending time in accomodation provided by Her Majesty's Government, and another that the Department of Defence had been so impressed by the demonstration that they took over our entire company for special and highly secret work in destructive technologies.

The truth is that we have spent the past few years studying philosophy. Our basic fault had been that we did not realise structuralism was a discredited concept, and the reason we could never derive a working machine from it is that the concept itself is invalid. So after years of study we now know what post-modernism really means, and we have designed this lovely little ornithopter to match. Everyone can have one; you can buy it with whatever components you like and put it together in whatever shape you want to do whatever you want. They come in all sorts of shapes and colours for two or more pilots -- passengers are an optional extra.

However, we are still trying to get them to the flying stage.



"It is certainly a considerable distortion to say that 'In SF fandom, the standard of ultra-conservatism has been carried by the US fanzine *Fosfax*'... It appears JN considers the likes of Avedon Carol, Robert Margroff and Brian Earl Brown ultra-conservatives."

Another quote from Timothy Lane's response in *Fosfax* 161 to Joseph's article in the previous *FTT* -- from which one assumes that in the Lane universe a fanzine's political affiliations should be judged less by its editorial line than by the letters of those who disagree with it. On the same basis, therefore, Lane would presumably argue that because *FTT* has published (and hopes to publish again) letters from US conservatives disagreeing with its editors, it is therefore a right-wing publication.



# THE LETTER COLUMN

Edited by Joseph Nicholas

Responding to Judith's article in the previous issue, several North American readers mentioned that they'd never heard of traffic calming, and wanted more details. Briefly, "traffic calming" is the name for measures applied to streets in residential areas with the aim of reducing speeds and thus noise, pollution, and accidents. Key ingredients are placing humps across the carriageway, and eliminating straight lines by widening the pavements (US: sidewalks) at staggered intervals to create chicanes or dog-legs, installing benches, flower troughs and other "street furniture" to block longer sightlines, and bollarding-off selected intersections to force through drivers to take more circuitous routes....or, preferably, to avoid residential areas altogether.

Having begun with an editorial comment about transport issues, it seems only fair to let the letter-writers continue the theme:

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"I support less car use, but I travel two hours each way to and from work by increasingly expensive and unreliable public transport (British Rail don't bother to apologise for a delay of less than fifteen minutes on the York-Scarborough run; ten minutes late is the norm), and I do get tired of that. Rory, as a rural GP in an area with

generally very poor public transport and a higher than average proportion of elderly people, does a much larger number of home visits than urban GPs with similar list sizes, and he does them all by car. I try to do as much as possible of my shopping locally, but Sleights doesn't have a bank, so I must travel into Whitby (about four miles away) for money and the things the local shop doesn't sell. Whichever route I take, there is a hill I can't cycle up; I have to get off and walk. Motorists on the local roads (both tourists and locals) don't expect cyclists, and pass frighteningly close and fast. It is frequently rainy, or foggy, or both, and I dislike cycling along narrow unlit winding country roads in the dark, knowing that my safest course of action when I spot a car coming is to dismount and get into the hedge, because the car driver won't see me in time, lights and reflective jacket notwithstanding. If we were living in Cambridge or York, I'd cycle much more."

You may be interested to know that in France -- as we learned during our cycling tour of Brittany in 1990 -- a collision between a car and cyclist is automatically deemed to be the motorist's fault, who then has to prove his innocence. As a result, French motorists always give cyclists plenty of road room....and the visiting British drivers who don't are immediately identifiable.

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"Although I own and use a car, I am constantly aware of (a) my failings in 'wanting' to drive, and (b) the almost total inadequacy of public transport outside the major conurbations. Where we live now, a sprawling village-cum-town of about 9000 souls, we have one bus every two

hours, and that's it. But even London has suffered tremendous cutbacks in service provision, as the invidious move towards route-tendering catches on and the supposed 'evils' of cross-subsidisation are abolished. I pity Londoners for the fact that they too will see the 'Tory glory' of a bus free-for-all within the next eighteen months. I know of nowhere in the UK that bus deregulation has actually succeeded, or services have improved, without the removal of 'social services' from other parts of the locality. And don't even get me onto the railways, my favourite hobby-horse, particularly the woeful record of this government in reducing capital expenditure and operating subsidies, so encouraging freight traffic to leave the network. Only in the last ten years has rail lost all newspaper and much GPO traffic to the roads; and many 'privatised industries' (including coal and steel) are now considering a switch to road because they can then control traffic movements without contributing to infrastructure improvements.

"Judith is quite right to talk about a sustainable transport policy for the UK, but the trouble is that I can't see one emerging from the chaos and mismanagement of the past decade or so."

Alan Sullivan  
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"The thing I personally find disturbing about pressure groups of any kind is the incredible amount of work they have to do, only to be largely ignored by the government. After all, if the government is prepared to ignore the findings of research it has commissioned if those findings are not to its liking, it's all too easy to believe that they'll happily ignore pressure groups unless they can make some form of political capital out of them.

"Environmentally, I admit to a rather extreme view. Having seen the state of the air in London (you really notice it if you've been away for a day or two), I'm all for a total ban on private cars within city limits and drastic extension of the public transport systems to compensate. I recognise that this is unrealistic, but I can't see any other way of getting pollution levels in the city down. Such a reduction in traffic levels would make it that much easier to implement improved safety measures for pedestrians, but, again, I can't see any government agreeing to it -- let alone acting. The most comforting thing is that the people who work for these groups continue to do so, reaffirming that there are people who do care in spite of all these obstacles."

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"There are now excellent pedestrianised shopping areas in many larger towns, but (given that people usually can't get to these towns by public transport) inadequate car parking space. There are seldom enough seats for elderly people, or people with walking difficulties, in the pedestrianised areas because local authorities consider that seats attract teenagers who are classed, with alcoholics, as undesirable -- so that instead of providing facilities for so-called "undesirables" the authorities remove those that are of great value to other sections of the community. However, level, well surfaced pavements are as good for wheelchairs as for pedestrians, and as wheelchair users and children are closer to car exhaust pipes than the average adult pedestrian, the absence of vehicles from town centres is even more welcome.

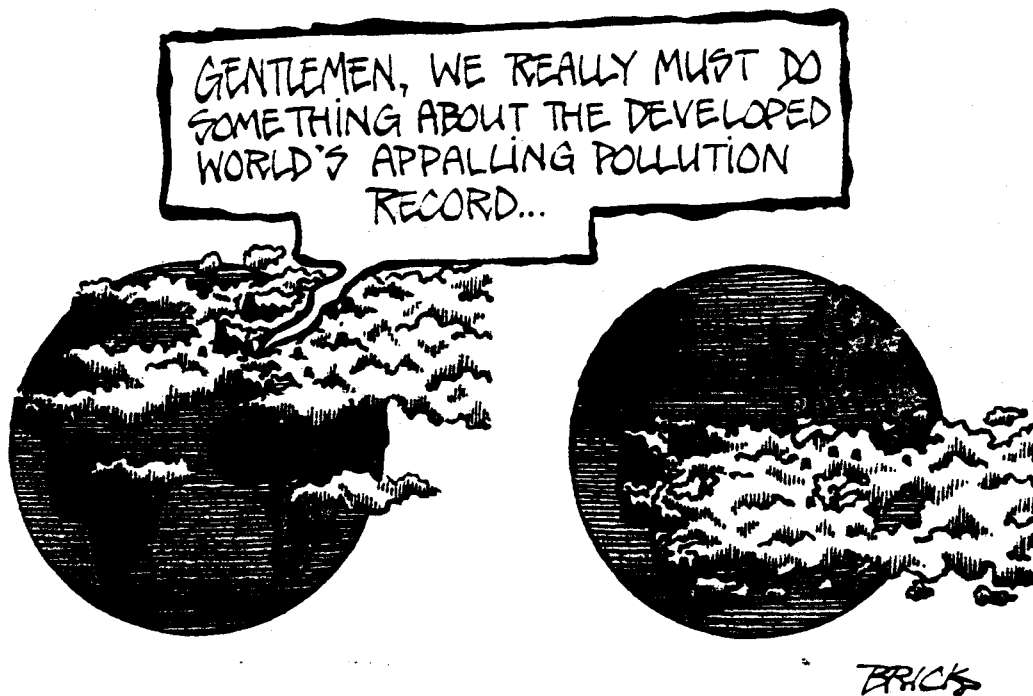
"In many small towns where people have prevailed on the authorities to provide crossings, they are all too frequently accidents waiting to happen. There simply is not enough time for wheelchair or pram pushers to cross, and bump the chair or pram up the kerb on the other side. Such crossings must be terrifying for blind people, as the sound-signal invariably stops before even the briskest walker has crossed and actually mounted the opposite pavement. Motorists, arrogantly sure of their right of way on the road when obeying the speed limit, will not slow down as they approach a crossing if the light has changed in their favour, and it is up to anyone still on the crossing to hop out of the way irrespective of their ability to hop.

"I confess that I lose heart. Twelve years ago, members of the all-party committees on disability in both Houses of Parliament were acknowledging points I had made in a research paper as valid, and pointing the way forward for legislative action. Today, new pressure groups are presenting the same points and they are receiving the same reaction, as if they had never been made before. I anticipate the same amount of action. Where some steps forward have been made, and legislation passed, there are always clauses that allow those with a vested interest to ignore the law. Here in Wantage, both state and church ignore the access laws with impunity.

"Thus it is with the environment. There has been concern about CFC gases for at least twenty years, acid rain and river pollution have been discussed for longer, and the toothless laws, reluctantly brought in, are readily circumvented by the multinationals that can most afford to clean up their act. On a smaller scale, there are the council houses lined with asbestos, the municipal rubbish tips with exposed toxic waste or improperly filled and built upon. Disability groups do not have the funds to take local councils to court, but I wonder that environmental groups do not take the same course of action. I understand that in the USA there is a group (with only one full-time employee) concerned with the cleaning the Potomac which regularly initiates successful action against polluters. Protest and petition we must, but if

such laws as do exist were regularly and fully used perhaps they would be formulated with less cynicism?"

One needs to bear in mind the clear differences between the US and British attitudes to the provision of environmental information. In the USA, environmental data is available to anyone who asks, and corporations which exceed their discharge permits or breach safety regulations can be instantly identified (which itself encourages them not to pollute); whereas here the information tends to be concealed by "commercial confidentiality" and "official secrecy", and the data that is released is usually made available in a form which makes it difficult for laypersons to interpret. In addition, until recently British courts have been unsympathetic to environmental issues, and the cost of bringing a private prosecution against a polluter has often been greater than any likely fine. Environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have thus concentrated on "headline" issues like the discharges from Albright & Wilson's plant in Cumbria, or relied on the EC Commission to intervene when the government has been in breach of an environmental directive. (A suggestion by Michael Howard, Secretary of State for the Environment, that the UK should withdraw from its EC environmental commitments was rapidly abandoned because of the embarrassingly obvious inconsistency between such a withdrawal and the rhetorical commitments the government made at Rio.) The passage of less cynically-framed legislation may have to await the retirement of the present generation of politicians and civil servants, who began their careers at a time when the environment was not an important an issue as it is now -- or simply the retirement of politicians and civil servants, period. They only frustrate the popular will, after all....



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"I have to take issue with Joseph's disparaging comments on Fukuyama's notion of the end of history. I have not read his famous essay; I base my conclusions on the extensive reviews and many pro and con articles on the topic. The way I understand it, it is irrelevant whether

Fukuyama is right or not; we cannot either prove or disprove his thesis; only time will tell, etc. etc.. What is relevant is the basic idea, that the forces which used to play a central role in the shaping of history over the last dozen decades or so may be fading from the scene. They are far from over; they've just started to fade, but fade they eventually must. If so, other forces are going to take their place on the stage as we prepare to open a new chapter in the history book. It's an interesting notion, and well worth exploring regardless of the strength (or lack of it) of Fukuyama's arguments."

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"I was particularly taken with the hatchet job on Fukuyama, with which I generally agree. (The 'End of History' is by no means Fukuyama's idea, nor even a recent one.) Joseph's uncertainty regarding his use of the Nietzschean 'Last Man' opens up an opportunity for clarification which I regret I do not wish to accept, being reluctant to bore you and totally pissed off with Nietzsche interpretations anyway. In fact, I've found the quote I was looking for, from Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*:

"I believe there has been no dangerous vacillation or crisis of German culture this century that has not been rendered more dangerous by the enormous and still continuing influence of this philosophy, the Hegelian. The belief that one is a latecomer of the age is, in any case, paralysing and depressing; but it must appear dreadful and devastating when such a belief one day by a bold inversion raises this latecomer to godhood as the true meaning and goal of all previous events, when his miserable condition is equated with a completion of world-history."

"Nietzsche was far more interested in genealogy than history; suffice to say, these ideas sit rather unhappily with the rest of Fukuyama's pseudo-philosophical hotchpotch (I can just see Nietzsche embracing liberal democratic capitalism as the true expression of the Overman...).

"What does interest me is the passage you quote which refers to feminist alternatives, since it also exemplifies Fukuyama's rather cursory knowledge of contemporary feminist philosophy. Strangely, the existence of genuine matriarchy (in Irigaray's sense, at least) really would be the end of History, given that Fukuyama's definition of it contains the gross phallogocentrism of modern science. This is an area which interests me greatly -- whether the Grand Narrative of Patriarchy is really compatible with the postmodern strategies that some feminist philosophies employ, etc.. (Rissy has just pointed out that debate about feminist philosophy, what little there is, still seems to be dominated by male participants. Attempts to create the first Feminist Philosophy post at Warwick University failed dismally after opposition from a number of male professors in the analytic mould. Strange, that. The worrying thing is that it's probably one of the better departments in the country, now I think about other places (the names of Roger Scruton and Hugh Mellor spring to mind: exemplars of academic BSE). Another casualty recently was Julia Kristeva, interviewed on television, who set about denying the value of her own work to espouse the joys of motherhood....) Helene Cixous has a much better idea with her distinction of male and female libidinal economies (with which she out-deconstructed Derrida!), but I'm in no state to pursue it right now. In any case, dragging in *real* philosophy to tackle Fukuyama is a bit like killing greenfly with napalm.

"At least our Common Room conversations have profited. Just as the Baudrillard jokes were getting a bit thin, up pops Fukuyama...."

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"Tangential to Joseph's thesis in 'Searching For An Enemy' is my interest, prompted in this instance by his mention of Descartes, in the nature of reality. Joseph repeats D. West's modification of his famous line as 'I think, therefore it is so' with the implication that such a statement is the zenith of self-centred irrationality. Interestingly, though, this is the least 'Cartesian' of his concepts, at least insofar as they were expressed in succeeding dualistic paradigms. Scientific dualism posited the existence of an objective reality independent of the presence of an observer. The statement 'I think, therefore I am' is in contradiction to this world-view since the implication is that the individual, and in your extension, the universe, is brought into existence by a subjective perception. This idea that the observer is intimately connected with the reality being observed, and according to Schrodinger's principle even brings that reality into existence, is as far as you can possibly get from reductionist dogma.

"The upshot of this is that statements such as 'I think therefore I am', or even 'I think, therefore it is so', are not as ridiculous as they might sound. Both encompass new thinking on the nature of reality and our place in it.

"My own view tends towards the notion that we in the West perceive a consensus

reality based on the prevailing scientific worldview (still primarily Cartesian, though changing), itself ultimately derived from Judeo-Christian dualism. In earlier times, the predominant view of the universe was very different. Magic was real because people believed it to be real. The world was flat because it was self-evident to people that it was so. There was no objective reality out there waiting to be uncovered, because the Cartesian worldview had not yet arisen. Each succeeding paradigm recreates the world anew.

"The mythology of a technological age demanded ray-guns, so we got lasers. The same is true of spaceships, and now even time travel has been shown to have no inherent physical impossibility. Immortality? It will come. Hyperspace? On the way. The galaxy will be teeming with life, courtesy of *Star Trek*, and consensus reality will construct the future universe the way it wants.

"If I have a problem with this concept, it is its anthropocentrism. In order for the universe to exist, it has to be apprehended by a consciousness, in this case, us humans. This is reminiscent of the medieval view of things where humankind was the peak of creation and the Earth was at the centre of the universe. The Principle of Mediocrity has a better track record. This states that the sun is an ordinary star, that life is common, and that our species is nothing special. Squaring this with the Anthropic Principle is not easy, but here's a suggestion: it may be that there is a continuum of universes, each with an observational point of view at its centre. When that consciousness ceases to exist, its universe also disappears; but others are always arising, so the continuum persists. The 'superuniverse' has a kind of independent existence, derived as it is from a constant flux of individual universes continually appearing and disappearing, yet each individual universe only arises in conjunction with a conscious point of view. Thus both the Anthropic Principle and the Principle of Mediocrity can be true at the same time."

*I should state at this juncture that Judith is deeply suspicious of all this....*

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"Re Alexis Gilliland's letter: surely there are paradigm shifts in religion -- Martin Luther and Protestantism, for example? Conversely, scientists don't all rush to embrace the new model -- for example, it took years before the theory of continental drift was accepted, although the evidence was there for decades; and there was entrenched denial of the celestial origin of meteorites by the French Academy in the eighteenth century. The 'objectivity' of science is a myth, as Stephen Jay Gould for one has shown; scientists are just as prone as anyone else to deny facts which go against cherished theories and sacred cows. In medicine, Oliver Sacks's papers on the negative effects of L-Dopa on some patients were met with violent denunciations, and most medical journals refused to publish them. Eventually, the appearance of these extreme side-effects in all hospitals forced acceptance of the phenomenon, but even then some doctors could not face the facts -- Sacks mentioned one individual who had denounced him in print being so outraged by a film showing stricken patients that he stormed out of the room rather than watch it!"

## Steve Bell





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"I can't accept Joseph's statement that 'if Islam did adopt European democratic ideals it would no longer be Islamic'. He may be adopting a narrow definition of Islam as a system where Mohammed's followers hold both religious and civil authority; and it's true that in present-day

countries where the Muslim religion is part of the power structure (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran) there is little democracy. However, Western European countries can still be called (culturally) Christian, although any observer of Christendom in the fifteenth century would have given the Christian religion very low marks for tolerance, freedom, democracy and all that. Cultures can evolve, and still retain their heritage. In fact, in present-day Bosnia, it seems to me that the Muslims have shown themselves more 'democratic' than their Serbian (Orthodox) countrymen."

*The "narrow definition" of Islam is precisely what is entailed by the concept of a society organised along Islamic lines, and in this sense an Islamic government can't do other than exercise both civil and religious authority. The societies usually labelled "Islamic" by the West are not truly Islamic at all, since apart from Iran there's a clear distinction between the powers of the secular and theological authorities. (Having a religious culture, in the sense that Western Europe may still be described as having a Christian base, is quite different.) In addition, and again apart from Iran, the governments of most "Islamic" states have not consulted, and hold no formal mandate from, a national electorate. The Koran requires that Islamic leaders rule through popular consent rather than acquired or inherited authority; elections via a ballot box are the modern means of obtaining such consent -- although the fact that the contending parties must demonstrate the adherence of their policies to Islam and the proscriptions of the mullahs makes Islamic democracy very different from the democracy which obtains in the West. (In many respects, it resembles that which obtained in the late Soviet Union.) Saudi Arabia, like many other Arab states (Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Oman, "liberated" Kuwait) is a dynastic fiefdom; and Pakistan is a democracy organised (however badly) along Western lines.*

Pascal Thomas

"It seems to me that a more interesting point is whether electoral democracy (not subject to the kind of tight *a priori* mullah-control you describe) can arise in societies of Islamic tradition, or pseudo-Islamic, or whatever you want to call the societies which refer to themselves as Islamic without qualifying as Islamic societies. But of course one could claim that a change in political system would change the character of those societies, so the question may be meaningless.

"But I don't quite understand what Joseph means by 'de-develop to release resources'. Development -- production -- in some places does not take away from other places, or rather it only uses up raw materials, the share of which in the finished product is steadily decreasing. That there is a global problem of overuse of natural resources (raw materials and clean air or water) is true, but a solution to these problems will not be achieved by brutal reductions in production. I suppose he has in mind something more subtle, like the example given about insulating homes, which to me does not fall under a heading like 'de-develop'."

*What's these days encoded in the vocabulary of "development" is a programme with a specific political and economic trajectory: one which follows, and tries to compress into three or four decades, two to three centuries of the evolution of Western society from an agrarian pre-industrial society to the post-industrial landscape of the present. The ideology of "de-development" seeks to unwind the overconsumption and maldistribution to which this path has led the West; to recognise (for instance) that the USA with only 6% of the world's population, cannot continue indefinitely to consume 25% of the world's annual GNP; and to recognise that the peoples of the Third World will never be lifted out of their poverty -- and the threat their poverty poses to the global environment will never be resolved -- unless existing inequalities of resource allocation and consumption are first addressed. The problem that the question of de-development poses for the over-developed West is perhaps most bluntly expressed by Prime Minister Mohammed Mahathir of Malaysia, to the effect that the South isn't going to take lessons from the North about reducing its development*

expectations unless the North first reduces its own. The rich are consuming too much, and as T. E. Trainer put it in *Abandon Affluence!*, must learn to live more simply that the poor may simply live.



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"I dispute Joseph's 'blunt fact' that the space age is over because it 'costs too much'. The bureaucratic NASA of today is far less efficient than the one which put men on the Moon, but its budget is much *smaller* than the annual increase in social security spending, or medical care.

Space investment -- not just sideshows -- need not be a major strain. I suspect he overestimates the wealth that's been wasted on arms.

"A useful analogy here is the exploration of the New World. It took a century to establish permanent, barely viable colonies. As implied, the problem is long-term financing. But I've read an entire book analysing the economic impact of New World ventures from 1492 to 1592, which plainly showed that Spain and Portugal made vast fortunes. Northern Europeans made profits, too, with the real gains to come in the next century from timber, furs, and new crops.

"I agree that the major problem of humanity is how to uplift the majority, mostly in the tropics, to a minimally decent level. (The person who hammered this home, principally against F. R. Leavis, was C. P. Snow.) But selfless North-South giving seems immensely unlikely and also ignores social changes by the South, which for ecological reasons can't get richer the way we did. So technological solutions are *essential*. Biotech is primary here, but the job can't be done without the resources of the solar system. Not just raw materials -- asteroid iron and solar power beamed from the Moon, say -- but by displacing polluting manufacturing industry into space, where undesired wastes can perhaps be expelled from the solar system entirely on the solar wind. Otherwise, your enclave Europe, cosy in its peace, ecology, feminism and human rights, will remain an island in a sea of misery for yet another century."

*I'll point out straight away that neither of us conceives or speaks of Europe as an "enclave" with which the rest of the world interacts minimally if at all; such a vision would contradict our arguments for global interdependence.*

*However, to argue that resolving the inequalities between North and South can't be done without mining the asteroids and moving manufacturing industry into space only postpones attempts to resolve the problem, and thereby ensures the worsening of existing differentials. (The per capita income of the richest countries is now 150 times that of the poorest, a gap projected to grow larger during the nineties unless current policies are reversed.) The consequences would be increased population, poverty, debt, environmental degradation, social instability within and between states -- and increased conflict between North and South for access to scarce resources. Resolving these problems is not a question of technology, but entirely one of political will. Desertification and deforestation, for example, are largely the product of the economic policies imposed on Third World nations by the IMF and the World Bank, which stress trade rather than aid and so require them to export ever more of their primary resources to earn the hard currency necessary to repay the IMF and World bank loans used to purchase the hydropower plants, steel mills and other inappropriate symbols of "development". (As Susan George shows in *The Debt**

Boomerang, there's a striking correlation between a country's indebtedness and its rate of deforestation: 16 of the 24 largest debtors have the greatest rate of forest loss; of the other eight, six lost most of their forests before becoming international debtors, and the remaining two had no significant forest reserves to begin with.) Desertification in the tropics is attributable largely to the use of the most fertile land to grow crops for export, pushing subsistence agriculturalists onto marginal land they'd otherwise never touch (an issue the North blocked discussion of at Rio because of the threat thus posed to its continued supply of cheap food). One simple step would begin to address these problems: cancelling the debt, which not only can never be repaid but in crude monetary terms has been repaid many times over.

Comparing the exploration of space with the settlement of the New World is common, but inapt. The new imperial powers could exploit what the New World offered because it possessed a native population which they could (and did) enslave, and which could feed itself. The new imperial powers needed to invest only in ships and soldiers -- whereas an expedition to mine the asteroids would need to provide itself not only with ships but also a labour force, their food, water, air and clothing, the mining and refining plant necessary to obtain and process the minerals, and God knows what else. (And the minerals would then be sold to the highest (Northern) bidder rather than the Third World.) The difference between the exploration of space and the settlement of the New World is thus not solely one of technology but one of degree, and the complexities, political and economic, are likely to prove insuperable.

Finally, comparisons of NASA's budget with the annual increases in other areas of US expenditure fails to address the question of where the huge sums of money necessary for the "colonisation" of space are to come from. (Certainly not from economic growth, since that would require annual growth rates of 10 or 15% a year.) If space enthusiasts expect us to pay for the realisation of their dream, they must explain what they would sacrifice to release the required funding, why we should make such sacrifices, and why we should pour money into the project for twenty, thirty, forty or more years in the hope of unknown future returns. To our knowledge, none have yet done so.

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"I was on a panel at Armadillocon with Karen Fowler and Kim Stanley Robinson, entitled 'Greens vs Technophiles'. All three of us were fairly naive about it. We didn't expect the right-wing loonies who turned up. I have no excuse for my naivete, having read Joseph's 'Searching For An Enemy'. I just didn't realise how shamelessly, invincibly stupid these people can be. The first Cold War dependent piped up from the audience almost immediately after we'd made our opening statements.

"(I must interject that these statements went along very pragmatic lines. None of us agreed with the polarisation implied by the topic. We all thought that technology should simply be used for other ends than profit or nationalist vanity. And I got to sharpen my little axe about how Greens were too inclined to see people as consumers who could change the world if only they recycled their pubic hair, rather than as producers and citizens exiled from all the significant arenas of power. So no one was a Deep Ecology partisan. No one wanted to jettison science. In fact, Stan Robinson developed an argument around how unscientific it was to believe that some technological magic was going to rescue us from the enormity of the problems we face in the next century. We were all fanatically moderate.)

"The first neanderthal remarked that he had a cousin who was 'a Stalinist until 1956, a Marxist-Leninist until 1968, and then she joined Greenpeace'. We were flabbergasted to hear the charges of communist perversion so quickly, comprehensively and unashamedly levied. Jayge Carr, who was supposed to be the moderator, was soon soaring off into the galaxy with some diatribe about -- and I do not exaggerate -- the tendency of federal government to assist with local school funding. The audience was instantly screaming at each other and at us and Carr was screaming at everyone.

"This babble-fest had begun scarcely twenty minutes into the panel. I seized the moderatorship from Jayge Carr, since her passions had clearly overwhelmed her judgement. When I did that, and it became clear that the emotional tone was coming down, that everyone would have their say, half the right-wingers got up and left. They'd only come to dominate, after all. A fair debate was not something they were

after. Once they'd left, we were able to listen to some terrifying reports by federal level and local level activists on the state of the economy and the ecology. Though there were still a few dorks in the audience. They really did distinguish themselves. A woman would say something about how soil samples taken behind her house had revealed a toxic dump and the dork would respond 'I have something which contradicts that'. And the story that followed would have nothing to do with the specific subject but would be about how some environmentalists once put nails in a tree. These people are not rational."



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"The idea that The Green Threat might replace The Red Threat which so recently and unexpectedly evaporated seems not unlikely. Green (ecology-oriented) groups in the USA are not sufficiently unified to be called a party, but they do tend to make proposals which strike at the very heart

of the ideals of freedom and independence and greed upon which our great nation has been built. Obviously, it is subversive to suggest that we reduce our standard of living ("de-develop") while there are resources and countries which remain un- (or under)exploited; and questioning the ideal that industrialists and entrepreneurs have a right to enormous profits unbinds the very framework of our culture, as well as making the people who control the government Very Nervous.

"If Greens could somehow be associated with drugs (as in 'The War Against...') (probably most of them *did* smoke pot, and perhaps even inhaled), with the decline of Family Values (people who are not home-buying white Christian legally-married couples with 2.6 children, 2.4 cars, 1.3 dogs, and 0.6 cats), and with the fomenters of inner city racial strife, the US government would have a more-than-adequate substitute for the communists and the Cold War. Unfortunately, such a conglomerate would have to be addressed primarily as a domestic problem, which requires working through Congress and the states, whereas the administration is least fettered and most effective when combatting external threats. (If the European Greens were to declare a War Against Acid Rain, and require us to reduce air pollution, *that* would be an External Threat, and we could kidnap them and try them here as Criminal Syndicalists, or something.)

"As a high school student, close to half a century ago, I was enthusiastic about the revolution against the excesses of Victorian decoration, as led by William Morris. After a decade or so of Modern architecture, though, I began to realise that I like the 'twiddly bits'. (Maybe it's a measure of my basic conservatism -- I even like baroque music.) As a human being, with lots of intellectual, psychological and emotional twiddly bits of my own (including a perhaps irrational desire to 'feel comfortable'), I don't really feel comfortable in or around these sparse, sterile, inhuman Modern buildings. For several decades, new big buildings in Los Angeles (unlike many in Minneapolis, Denver and Chicago) seem to have designed by salesmen from a structural steel supply company -- engineering textbook examples of how to

enclose maximum space with a minimum of materials and labour. Frankly, I'm too sensual to be satisfied by a city composed mostly of buildings which look like giant black shipping cartons.

"Apparently I'm not alone in such feelings, but neither am I pleased with the currently popular trend -- Frank Gehry's work is typical -- towards buildings that are quite interesting the first time you look at them, but are all used up by the third or fourth time. The Strip Mall Architectural Style currently ubiquitous in Southern California is even worse -- it *does* have twiddly bits, of a sort, but they look as though they've been cut from a Dover Clip-Art book and pasted on.

"Not that I either demand or object to simplicity, mind you -- Shaker buildings and furniture are extremely satisfying, and at least once a year I go through Gamble House, in Pasadena. Built by the Greene brothers in 1908 as a winter house for a scion of the soap family, the major influences are Japanese, Prairie, and Craftsman, with just enough twiddly bits to keep it interesting. The banister of the interlocking teak log staircase has insets of slightly raised and rounded ebony, to give the fingers something to do when one is ascending or descending. There's a seat built into the front hall, where one can sit and watch the changes of light beyond the Tiffany stained-glass entry, and the kitchen worktable has an inlaid flower of abalone on the apron. Twiddly bits are really important to those of us who don't want to be surrounded by mathematical perfection all the time."

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"I loved 'The Quack Doctor', marred only by the glaring error which you or Dr Caroline make by attributing the source to *Jonathan* Smart when all cat-lovers know it was *Christopher* Smart's consideration of his cat Jeffrey. This mistake obviously negates the whole point of the parodist and renders her protest irrelevant. If doctors

can't even get the first names of minor eighteenth century poets right, how can we expect them to cure cancer, AIDS, the common cold, and those odd spots appearing on my feet which might have something to do with the way the cat keeps scratching and then rubbing himself up against me but might be something entirely different?

"I was listening to some medical radio programme which featured a couple of homeopaths. 'Of course,' said one, 'there's something quite wrong about the idea that you dilute something a hundred times, then take the dilution and dilute that a hundred times. The actual substance can't be the effective agent.' No, the point was that between dilution you *shake the solution violently* and this apparently adds some sort of energy to the potion. Whether you could achieve the same effect by swallowing the stuff without the preliminary agitation and then jumping up and down for a while he didn't go on to explain.

"I think it's homeopathy which is supposed to be favoured by the alleged Royal family, though considering some of the other things they're supposed to believe in I never understand quite why this is supposed to be a point in its favour."

*A couple of other people also pointed out the error in the name of the poet; we blame the parodist. But time now, as Angus Deayton might phrase it, for our usual deeply thrilling list of those who also wrote but failed to surmount any of the arbitrarily imposed editorial thresholds for inclusion in the letter column proper. As follows: Harry Andruschak, Sheryl Birkhead ("I think there is no true editorial feel to Fosfax, since I don't see much editing"), Jeanne Bowman ("How Joseph managed to convey the grey cadet stupidity of the convention panel without naming names is a lesson to me"), Brian Earl Brown ("As an American, I'm still at a loss as to what a monarch actually does" -- so are we, chum), Andy C, Tommy Ferguson, Tom Fülöpp, Chuch Harris (repeating various arguments in favour of road-building which have been refuted several times before), Matthias Hofmann, Rhodri James (discussing some of the problems caused by introducing inadequately-researched traffic calming in Cambridge), Ken Lake, Adham Loutfi, Mark Nelson, Lloyd Penney ("I feel that the only people who will benefit from dozens of new, tiny countries in Europe will be philatelists and cartographers"), Vicki Rosenzweig, Yvonne Rousseau, Cyril Simsa (a tape of some nifty Czech music), Dale Speirs, David Thayer, Kristin Thorrud, Susan Tonkin, and Lesley Ward. Our thanks to you all.*



# LIES, DAMNED LIES, AND STATISTICS

Joseph Nicholas

Joseph Major is a regular contributor to the US fanzine *Fosfax*. Book reviews, articles, columns, bizarre opinions (including, recipients of the previous issue of *FTT* will recall, a claim that I am the "moral equivalent" of Burgess, Philby and MacLean) pour from him. In *Fosfax* 162, he voices another opinion about me. Noting the capture in September 1992 of Abimael Guzman, leader of Peru's Sendero Luminoso guerillas, Major states that "it's time to note a comment made by a fanatic-type termagant in Benoit Girard's *The Frozen Frog*"; and continues:

"This furious tempestuous typist informed Benoit that the reason the Shining Path was so on the rampage was because the IMF had commanded that Peru repay its debts, diverting Peruvian government revenues from beneficent social services, thus the Senderistas vented their rage and were worth understanding.

"The problem is that Peru hasn't paid a *centavo rojo* on its debt in the past fifteen years. Six years ago, President Alan Garcia formally defaulted on the Peruvian foreign debt. Now aren't feckless tiny tantrums from Frinton Road reliable in their adherence to facts?"

Unfortunately for Joseph Major, it is his own "adherence to facts" that is at fault. Far from not repaying any of Peru's debt, the military and civilian governments of the 1960s and 1970s maintained what the IMF considered an acceptable level of debt servicing (usually by rolling over the interest into capital), and thus remained eligible for further loans. But the debt continued to grow (from US\$3 billion in 1973 to US\$6 billion in 1978), and in 1978 the Belaunde government signed an "austerity" agreement with the IMF in an effort to regain control of it. But the export revenues to meet the interest payments continued to fall (down by 25% between 1980 and 1983), and when elected president in 1985 Alan Garcia declared that future repayments would be limited to 10% of foreign earnings. The IMF classed the existing loans "non-performing" and ruled Peru ineligible for further aid. The commercial banks followed suit, the foreign reserves to pay for vital imports ran out in 1987, inflation and unemployment rose sharply -- and in 1988 Garcia abandoned the 10% limit and recommenced repayments. However, the IMF's insistence that the arrears be cleared before further loans were disbursed meant little improvement. Further "austerity" was imposed following the election of Alberto Fujimori in 1990, and debt repayments have continued.

These facts are readily available -- my source for the above is Susan George's *The Debt Boomerang* -- so one wonders why Major is so unaware of them. Either he knows far less about the world than he pretends, or his desire to score a political point meant that the facts had to be discarded altogether.

However, this is not the most important part of his outburst. Note carefully the concluding sentence in the first of two paragraphs quoted above, in which he repeats my point that concentration on debt repayments diverts revenue from socially necessary spending, exacerbating and allowing the Senderos to exploit existing inequalities; but he adds that I said they "were worth understanding".

My letter in Benoit Girard's *The Frozen Frog* 4 (written in June 1992, before Guzman's capture) is too long to quote in full, but here's the salient passage:

"Thus, as communist movements elsewhere retreat in disorder, one faces the prospect of a Third World communist movement actually coming to power -- one that by all accounts is even more bizarre and distorted than Stalin's and Ceaucescu's. Its leader, Abimael Guzman, who styles himself as 'the fourth sword of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought', is clearly a pathologically disordered personality; but he has an army, he has mass support amongst the rural peasantry, and it looks as though he'll win."

From this it should be obvious that I neither condone nor support the Senderos -- and equally obvious that Major's claim that I said they "were worth understanding" is a fabrication. Indeed, it's a deliberate insinuation that I do sympathise with them.

Major thus provides a clear demonstration of the *Fosfax* style of political argument: ignore the facts, resort to smears to make your case -- and then censor any response from the person attacked. Hence the need to reply to him here.

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## LOONYWATCH

### A ROUND-UP OF CRAZED NONSENSE FROM THE RIGHT-WING PRESS

Remember Rodney King, the black motorist who was beaten senseless by LA policemen, and whose assailants were subsequently acquitted by an all-white jury? Most people might think that King was a victim of institutionalised racism and that the verdict was indefensible -- but some quarters would have you believe that King *brought the beating on himself*. This, for example, from Timothy Lane in *Fosfax* 161:

"All of the networks showed a portion of the video -- the portion in which King is being beaten -- repeatedly. In doing so, they neither showed nor mentioned the part of the video in which King, about to be handcuffed and *not yet beaten*, suddenly jumped up and lunged at one of the officers. Nor did they mention that there were two other people in the car with King, neither of whom apparently was beaten. They also neglected to mention that King was hit twice by a taser gun, and it didn't stop him; the police had every reason to believe that this horrendously reckless driver was on angel dust. (Apparently, he was really only drunker than a lord.)" (Emphasis in original.)

We are presumably supposed to believe that the only question at issue is whether delivering one hundred and forty-odd blows to a drugged or drunken driver, rather than sharing them equally amongst the passengers, is a "proportionate response" -- a presumption which Lane later confirms:

"One of the most disgusting responses I saw came from a Detroit columnist, who happened to be black. His claim was that King would have been beaten up, once his car was stopped, no matter what he did or how he looked. The evidence in the case completely refutes him; the beating of King, at least at the start, was understandable and probably justified. (The real question of the trial was how *long* it should have continued. Few people, especially the media, seem to have understood this.)" (Emphasis in original.)

One wonders how few blows Lane thinks King should have received before the beating could be said to have gone on too "long". One hundred and ten? One hundred? Or should they indeed have been shared amongst the passengers, so that each received only forty-eight?

These comments appeared to evoke little protest -- either the events concerned were so old that they were only of historic interest, or the dissenters were ruthlessly suppressed. Conservative readers, however, agreed with Lane. Here, for example, is Poul Anderson, from *Fosfax* 162:

"As for the miscalled Rodney King trial and the riots that followed, obviously I agree that, yes, the jurors did their conscientious best and arrived at the correct verdict under the law (if the charges had been misdemeanour rather than felony, they might well have found differently) and, yes, the violence, destruction and looting were not a political protest but the work of criminals and crazies whom the police let get out of hand. In defence of the police, be it said that if they had taken decisive action at the outset, the liberal media would have crucified them."

While Alexander Slate (also in *Fosfax* 162) argues that:

"Certainly, Rodney King is at least partly to blame for what happened to him that night (and he has proved to be anything but an angel since that night). But I also believe there were things that could have been done to avoid a lot of the apparent savagery on the part of the police. If nothing else, they could have hog-tied him. .... So, were they guilty of what they were charged with legally? I don't think so. Should they get off totally scot-free? Again, no. But the punishment should be an administrative one. As public servants and guardians of the public trust, the police (like anyone else in that situation) are more responsible for their actions than normal people."

Well, if you can beat someone senseless and be let off with nothing more than an "administrative" punishment, who cares how many blows you inflict?

Let's turn now to Anita Hill, the woman who accused Judge Clarence Thomas of sexual harrassment during the US Senate's hearing of his appointment to the Supreme Court, and had her testimony dismissed by chauvinist Senators who later paid the price in female electoral support. The *Fosfax* line on Hill was simple: that she was lying. Here's Timothy Lane again, in reply to a letter from Alexis Gilliland in *Fosfax* 162:

"I don't think Anita Hill's motive for perjury was money, though she may well have considered it. I think she got caught up in an escalating pattern that started with an error by Susan Hoerchner and turned into an outright lie. Yes, I know there was another woman ready to testify: I also read at the time that she had a provable grudge against Thomas (as, to a milder degree, did Anita Hill, who also politically opposed Thomas). If Biden had felt the other witness was credible, I'm sure she would have testified.

"I also think some women ('femocrats', as I call them) are ready to use false sexual harrassment charges as a weapon. This has made me very sceptical about many such charges -- unfortunate, because they often are true, but so be it. Those who support perjury must pay the price. Those who treat men routinely as enemies must expect men to regard them in the same fashion."

Words fail us.

(Contributions to future "Loonywatch" columns, from sources other than *Fosfax*, are welcome.)

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