



**GARDENERS
WORLD UNITE! OF THE**

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REVOLUTIONARY ARMY NOW

*You have nothing
to lose but
your weeds*

*You have nothing
to lose but your
daisy chains*

INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER

Building Horticulturalism in a New Economic Zone!

Issue 1, January 1998

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"The most vociferous defender of the hereditary principle is Geoffrey Russell, the 4th Baron Amptill, who was admitted to the upper chamber in 1976 after a two-year battle for the title with his half-brother, John Hugo Trenchard Russell. Geoffrey Russell's problem was that his parents' marriage, which ended in a famous divorce, had been unconsummated: his mother was still a virgin while pregnant with him. She did, however, spend one night in the same bed as her husband, during which he engaged in 'Hunnish practices' -- otherwise known as masturbation. The Hon Geoffrey persuaded the House of Lords privileges committee that a few drops of the nobleman's sperm had somehow infiltrated the Baroness, thus making him the rightful heir. He is probably the only member of parliament who earned his seat by proving that his father was a wanker."

(Francis Wheen excoriates the House of Lords (again),
"Wheen's World", *The Guardian*, 1 October 1997)

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Joseph Nicholas

Why this issue is late....

....is the worst sort of introduction one can read in any fanzine, and I groan inwardly every time I encounter it, knowing that the so-called "editorial" which follows will be little more than a collection of disjointed comments about the need to first have the decorators in to wallpaper the cat or the children taken to the vet to be put down – or about not having anything to say anyway. So why publish? I snarl, hurling the thing aside with a force of which Dorothy Parker would be proud -- pausing only to wonder how any issue of any fanzine can possibly be "late" when publishing fanzines ought to be something we do for pleasure, not according to rigid pre-set deadlines. (Almost as worse as excuses for lateness are editors who miss their self-set deadline and then publish bumper-sized double or triple issues, claiming that this allows them to "catch up" -- but why bother with such numbering schemes when as far as the recipients are concerned an issue is an issue is an issue, and therefore needs no more than one number irrespective of how many pages it has?)

Nevertheless, it has been rather longer than we intended when we published *FTT 21*, in the dear dead days when there was still a Conservative government and cries of "Labour sell-out!" had yet to be heard throughout the land.

We have no excuse for this, beyond the attractions of doing environmentalist street theatre, digging the allotment, watching moofies, building shelves, and (summer months only) lounging around the garden ensuring that one's buns are properly toasted. (Well, those are my excuses. Judith's involve gardens, dolls-houses, and saving the world.) But because we are running later than we intended, North American readers will not see this issue until even later.

As some British readers will know, we will be away in Australia for all of February, visiting relatives (mostly) and fans (squeezed into a few days between Sydney and Perth), and will not return to the UK until the weekend before the Leeds Corflu in March (which we do plan to attend, slightly frazzled though we may still be -- and don't let our absence stop you from responding to this issue, either). This means that although all the British copies will go out this month, none of the North American copies will be mailed until after Corflu, simply because we haven't the time to print them between now and when we go. (While the Australian copies will be printed from the masters which we shall take with us. Such foresight!)

Grovelling apologies in advance to our North American readers, then. Or not, as you prefer.

Europe: A History, by Norman Davies, was published in 1996, to great acclaim. I finally got around to reading it during the 1997 Christmas/New Year break.

In his introductory chapter, Davies summarises the problems of writing a comprehensive history of Europe, with particular reference to the geographical elisions and hidden political agendas perpetrated by earlier attempts. One such was Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *Europe: A History Of Its Peoples*, published in 1991: "The timing of the venture was unfortunate, since it reached the market at the very time when its geographical frame of reference had just collapsed. It had defined 'Europe' as the territory of the member states of the EC, with Scandinavia, Austria and Switzerland thrown in. The status of Finland, Poland, Hungary and Bohemia, it had intimated, was not clear. So here was yet another exercise in western civilisation. Several of the critics were not kind. Its moral tone was likened by one reviewer as 'reminiscent...of Soviet-bloc historiography'. Elsewhere its approach was summed up in the headline 'Half-truths about half of Europe'."

These quotes are sourced, with the latter given as:

"J. Nicholas, 'Half-truths about half of Europe', *The Guardian*, 25 Oct 1991."

Not my headline, alas, which would have been crafted by a sub-editor; but definitely my letter in the paper, denouncing Duroselle's distortions and incompleteness.

Thus I am -- literally -- a footnote in (a) history.

THE FUTURE STARTS HERE

Joseph Nicholas

New Labour. New Britain. New fanzine title!

More or less. The title actually began over a year ago as a joke on the letters page of *The Guardian's* weekend magazine, following a riposte by local Trotskyist Keith Flett to the gardening correspondent's essay on weed control. Flett, as British readers may be aware, is a member of the SWP and an inveterate letter-writer to newspapers and magazines; his argument that weeds had as much right to exist as other plants, signed as from the editor of *Socialist Gardener*, prompted us into a mock-ideological counter-riposte, making a serious point under cover of a parody of the sectarian splittism to which Trotskyists are so prone. Thus we welcomed the comradely utility of chickweed and fat-hen, which can be harvested and eaten as other greens, and condemned the rapacious banditry of bindweed and brambles, which should be expunged like capitalists everywhere; and signed it as editors of *International Revolutionary Gardener*. It was printed *verbatim*. We hope Flett laughed. (We know that several other people did. But a couple of weeks later we received a letter from someone wanting to know more about our publication, and had to write back laboriously explaining the joke.)

The title then hung around in limbo until we began thinking about publishing the previous issue, when we decided that *FTT* 21 would be the last to bear that name. We even slipped in a couple of references to the new title which we thought would not evade the scrutiny of our ever-diligent readership; but perhaps they did. Or perhaps the fact that only a couple of people made oblique references to the impending change of title meant not that everyone else hadn't noticed but that they had noticed but didn't feel it necessary to comment. Or....

In any case, it's not as though the fanzine is likely to become radically different from what it already is. Any changes will be incremental, as part of the same process of natural development the thing has undergone since we started publishing in 1985 (long-standing readers may find it interesting to compare those early issues, or even those published in the early nineties, with those published during the last couple of years). *International Revolutionary Gardener* will, like *FTT*, continue to reflect our interests and

concerns, irrespective of whether they intersect with fandom at large and whether the resulting publication can truthfully be described as a "science fiction fanzine".

So why the change, some might ask. For much the same reasons that we earlier dropped the Loonywatch column and the Wobbly Bits' Hall of Shame: because just as we grew bored with them, we've grown bored with thinking up new combinations of words for *FTT*. We felt that it was time to try something different, just as did the rest of the electorate on May Day last year. Albeit that we don't have any manifesto commitments and a 179-seat Parliamentary majority....

If it hadn't been for a certain traffic accident last August, the question "Were you still up for Portillo?" instead of "Where were you when Princess Diana died?" might have been the catchphrase of 1997; but perhaps it's just as well that it wasn't, since all glorious new dawns have their downside sooner or later, and the New Labour government's honeymoon soon wore off. How could it be otherwise? Tony Blair's social conservatism, economic neo-liberalism and thoroughgoing authoritarianism is little different from Margaret Thatcher's or John Major's, so why expect anything other than a continuation of Conservative policies? Even if the resulting spectacle of a Labour government implementing cuts in lone parent and disabled benefits in the guise of welfare "reform" is downright bizarre -- but no more bizarre than the argument that it has to carry on where its predecessor left off. (A compliment the Conservatives are unlikely to reciprocate if and when they return to office.) Sure, Labour will give us Scottish and Welsh parliaments, restore some form of governing authority for London, introduce some Freedom of Information legislation (doubtless riddled with exemptions), incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, and perhaps abolish the rights of hereditary peers to vote in the Lords -- but these constitutional reforms are timid compared to what could be done by a government which was genuinely interested in the subject.

Or take the environment, another area where reform was promised but where tinkering at the margins is all that's been delivered -- for example, Labour announced before the election

that it would scrap forthwith twelve of the most controversial new road schemes proposed by the Tories; then decided after a so-called accelerated review to proceed with five of them, coincidentally those which would destroy the largest number of SSSIs and Green Belt land. And when not tinkering at the margins, Labour is doing nothing at all -- before the election, it promised to review Conservative plans to build 4.4million new homes on greenfield sites rather than bring contaminated inner city sites back into use; then announced that it didn't have any money to pay for decontamination so greenfield building would proceed anyway. More environmental vandalism is to be delivered in the shape of the Cardiff Bay barrage, which Labour promised to abandon because it would destroy internationally important and protected wetlands but which it then decided would proceed after all; when asked under the Environmental Information Regulations for a copy of the review to support the decision, the Welsh Office refused pointblank on the grounds that it did not involve environmental considerations (and so much for Freedom of Information). But then, as a former adviser to environment minister Michael Meacher revealed, the green rhetoric in the manifesto was never more than greenwash, intended to keep the public in general quiet and environmental lobbyists in particular off Labour politicians' backs while they pursued their preferred agenda of sucking up to industry and the City.

So it's less bold new young thrusting modern go-ahead Britain than new management for the existing order, as the sell-outs and U-turns pile up almost too fast to be counted. Robin Cook announces that human rights would have a more central place in British foreign policy; then promises that Britain will remain amongst the world's top four arms exporters. Tony Blair announces a "comprehensive spending review" to release money for education and healthcare; then excludes from it the unusable Trident nuclear missile system, the overpriced and already-out-of-date Eurofighter, and the fatuous Millennium Dome at Greenwich for the year 2000 "celebrations". (It speaks volumes for Labour's cultural priorities that it's prepared to squander £750million on a giant fibreglass tent with the life expectancy of a garden shed but can't find £44million for a once-and-for-all restoration of the landscape around Stonehenge.) John Prescott announces the establishment of Regional Development Agencies to draw up strategic plans for economic development in the English regions; then proposes that their boards should consist of

businessmen appointees, making them as unaccountable as any Tory quango. Frank Dobson promises to ban all tobacco advertising and sports sponsorship; then exempts Formula One motor racing because Labour had received a £1million donation from the millionaire in charge of it. Chancellor Gordon Brown promises to outlaw tax-avoiding offshore trusts; then appoints as Paymaster-General a millionaire MP whose wealth is sheltered in one. And on, and on, and on; one's depression at the prospect of another four years of this is alleviated only by the thought that, his son having been caught out dealing drugs, one need never again take seriously Jack Straw's rants about the evils of cannabis and parents who pay more attention to their careers than their children.

Still, all this might matter more if governments mattered more. Never mind the popular disgust with the Tories' sleaze and economic incompetence which pitched them into oblivion; politicians in general are reviled for their uselessness, and beneath the headlines of the huge Labour victory the turn-out at the 1997 election was in fact the lowest since 1935. There will be lots of reasons for this, and once the psephologists have finished crunching their way through the demographics we can get down to discussing them, but for the present it needs to be recognised that at base there is no difference between Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats because they have all surrendered to the threat of globalisation: to a world order in which international markets rule and free trade is everything, and from which social and economic stability is therefore absent because control of the domestic economy has been handed over to trans-national corporations, to be run in the interests of their profits rather than people's needs. In which case, national governments are irrelevant -- so who cares which bunch of suits happens to dominate a Victorian debating chamber by the Thames?

Some statistics, by way of illustrating how little role national governments now have in economic affairs. According to research by the New Economics Foundation, the world's top 500 corporations are now responsible for one-quarter of global output despite employing only 0.05% of the global population; the combined assets of the fifty largest corporations amount to 60% of the world's \$20 trillion of productive capital; 50% of the global market in eight of the largest sectors of the global economy -- including cars, aerospace, electronics, steel, armaments and media -- is controlled by just five corporations; and that if

current trends continue, by the middle of the next century only 20% of the world's population will have any work -- the rest will be wholly surplus to the TNCs' requirements. Finance has been so globalised that it now has the potential to destabilise the economies of entire nation-states, as the collapse of the East Asian "little tigers" has shown, and from which the West in general will not be immune. (The level of speculation is ridiculous: of the trillions of dollars, yen, pounds, marks and francs which swirl through the world's currency markets every day, less than 5% is concerned with the production of goods and services; the rest is casino-style gambling on marginal movements in interest rates. Even a leading currency speculator such as George Soros is now calling for international controls over the financial markets to curb the instability they cause.) Trans-national corporations rather than nation-states are now the principal players in the global economy, and the theories of comparative advantage and demand management which still dominate conventional economic thinking are therefore quite redundant.

This will be to repeat something we've said before, but: the role of national governments now is merely one of service providers for international capital, competing with each other to make their economies more "efficient" and thus more "attractive" to inward investment. To achieve this, governments will have to jettison every piece of legislation which the World Trade Organisation's free trade rules might conceivably deem "protectionist" -- including, potentially, international agreements on climate change, forestry and desertification -- while the Multilateral Agreement on Investment will free trans-national corporations from any obligations to the nation-states in which they operate and thus governments from any control over rates of company taxation, levels of profits repatriated, proportion of local ownership and local resources used, minimum wages, and control of working hours and standards of working safety. (The government repeatedly says of the MAI that it "would not want to see an agreement which undermined our environmental, labour or development policies", thus confirming Labour's sheer incomprehension of what globalisation entails -- while US negotiators, by contrast, are so concerned at the MAI's potential to override US labour, environment and investment regulations that they are proposing a clause which would specifically exempt the USA from complying with it.) The resulting "race for the bottom", as nation-states compete to be the cheapest -- and thus the

poorest -- will only exacerbate current inequalities of income and opportunity, both between the rich North and the poor South and within the countries of the North and South. Naturally, the suits in their Victorian debating chamber will be handsomely rewarded from the public purse for their effort and "sacrifice"; the rest of us, however, will be subjected to increasingly shrill exhortations to tighten our belts another notch in preparation for the one last heave which will see us safely round the corner and onto the sunlit uplands of limitless prosperity and opportunity -- next year, maybe, or the year after, or perhaps the one after that....

Sounds too apocalyptic? Then kindly note that in the name of free trade the WTO is already attacking the rights of nation-states to decide their own affairs. Last August, for example, it ruled in favour of US complaints that the EU's ban on milk and meat treated with bovine growth hormone amounted to restraint of trade -- ignoring the fact that the hormone causes udder infection, increases the milk's fat content, and has a contaminant thought to enhance the risk of breast cancer. Last September, for another example, the WTO ruled against the EU's protection of banana exports from former British and French colonies in the Caribbean on the grounds that it discriminated against bananas produced by US TNCs such as Del Monte and Chiquita -- leaving the Caribbean islands, which lack the same economies of scale, facing economic ruin. Shortly, for a third example, the WTO is to hold preliminary hearings into suggestions by agribusiness TNCs such as Monsanto that it should forbid the separate labelling of genetically modified foods -- which would make it impossible for us as individuals to choose what we eat. And before you think that the US will be the only beneficiary, note that the WTO is also to challenge US legislation which prohibits shrimp imports from nations such as Pakistan, India, Thailand and Malaysia whose fishing methods drown thousands of turtles a year, and that it has already forced the US to amend its Clean Air Act to allow the import of oil from more polluting Brazilian and Venezuelan refineries.

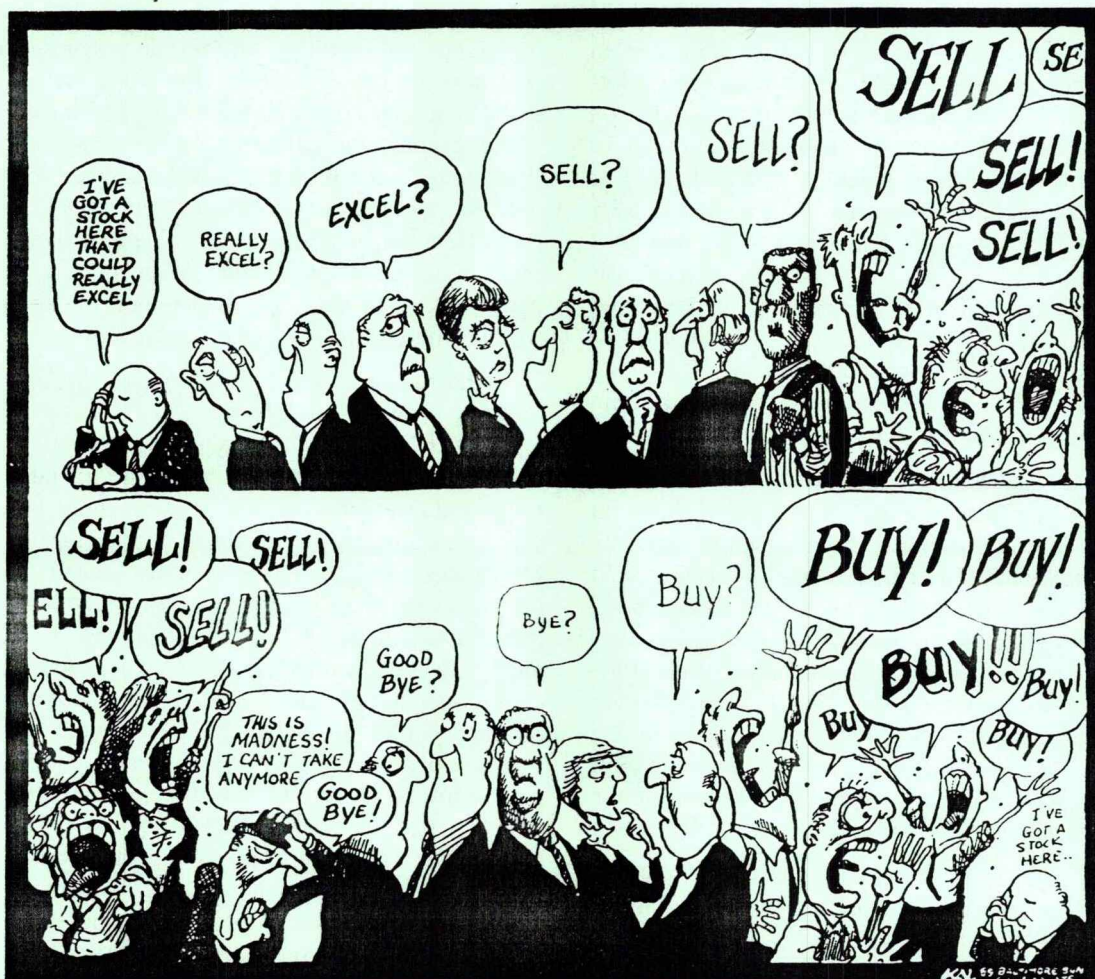
Thus even such basics as food, air, water and human health are considered to be dispensable in the brave new flexible world of globalised competitiveness. But before black despair closes completely over your head, remember that there is a way out of this threatened spiral of decline. Quite simply, we should forget the role of national governments, forget the nineteenth-century idea of nation-states, forget the false "demands" of the

market, and start to reclaim our autonomy as individuals by cutting free as far as possible from the nation-state and the wider world. To wait for men (and women) in suits to deliver social change is to abdicate our ability to bring about change for ourselves, and thus a waste of precious time -- we are perfectly capable of acting for ourselves, independently and co-operatively, and damn well should. Our aims now should be: localism wherever possible; regionalism where necessary; nationalism only when absolutely unavoidable.

Or, to adopt some sloganising exhortation appropriate to our new title: Comrades! As international revolutionary gardeners, it is time for us to take up our forks and watering cans and to begin anew the quest for genuinely tasty food which has not been contaminated by late industrialism and twentieth-century mal-development! We must go forward, arm-in-arm and shoulder-to-shoulder across the headless corpses of the international currency profiteers and

their lickspittle pensions advisers, to found our own community banks and regional and local currencies with which to free ourselves from the tyranny of the centre! We must shake our chains from slumber and rise in unvanquishable number, omitting several pages of surplus slogans in the interests of not going over the page limits, to forge new bonds between the oppressed peoples of the globe which by refusing to acknowledge the economic and political hegemony claimed by the TNCs and their WTO and MAI enforcement agencies will deny and liquidate their attempt to control the future!

And you can all start by reading Richard Douthwaite's *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies For Security In An Unstable World*, which provides detailed explanations of how to achieve just what its subtitle says, derived from the hands-on experience of people from around the world. Because if they can break free, then so can we.



Front cover illustration from *The Economist*, 1-7 November 1997

Saving the World for Fun but no Profit

Judith Hanna

Life felt uncomfortably crowded back in March 1997, so I made a little list of all the things I was supposed to be doing. After all, as I said in FTT20, I went for a part-time job by way of buying back time to get the most from life: gardening, writing, drawing, saving the world and relaxing. The trouble is that there is simply too much interesting stuff to get involved in. Twenty separate projects, when I counted them up. "That's ridiculous," said Joseph. "That's far too many. You'll have to give some up." But which?

Top of the activity list were my gardens. Perhaps if our own garden were larger, I wouldn't have collected so many others. As it is, as well as our edible, permacultural back yard, we had a double front garden for flowers (taken over next door's patch), two allotments, and an Old School community nature garden on Tottenham Green. One of the allotments is our new official full-size plot (seven poles of it. A pole, rod or perch, says the Oxford Dictionary, is 5 metres or 16.5 feet, or a square with sides that length. Our plot is 2 poles deep by 3.5 poles long). The other is an unofficial half-share, which we'll give up when we've harvested the crops we'd put in before our official plot came through. Joseph dug the new allotment a pond and bog garden, which have attracted admiring comments from co-allotmenters but, so far, no frogs.

Next on the list were my national organisations: I'd been chair of the Permaculture Association (Britain) in 1996, and had stepped down from chairing the New Economics Foundation to being merely a trustee. Next time elections come up, I'll give up NEF -- I've been on their management group since they were a small, mostly unknown, almost entirely voluntary initiative back at the beginning of the 1990s. Now, they're an established thinktank and consultancy getting contracts from the World Bank, UN agencies, OECD, EU and suchlike. But I'm now secretary for PCA, which is currently at the same sort of stage as NEF was when I got involved with that.

I reckon I have a knack for picking up issues that are about to burst into the headlines: I was on the staff of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament during the mid-80s, when the Cold War game of nuclear chicken was the huge headline issue. Then I moved to Transport

2000 the week before Kings Cross station caught fire, and spent the following three years coping daily with TV and national newspapers wanting our views about why cities were choking with traffic and public transport breaking down, and what should be done about it. What should be done is perfectly clear -- not let people clog city roads with cars so that the alternatives have space to move and the air stays breathable. Now NEF is riding the wave -- and I hope that within five years, the headlines will have caught up with permaculture.

Australian readers will know what permaculture is: the term was invented there by a forestry scientist, Bill Mollison. Our leaflet says "Permaculture is a way of designing and creating sustainable environments and systems. It can be used for farms, gardens and architecture, by communities, businesses and schools, to create healthy and efficient places to live and work." What attracts me is that it is a toolkit for working out how to put your environmental and ethical principles into practice in whatever you're doing, making best use of the resources to hand. Writing a book about permaculture in real life is another of my projects: working title, *Gardening the Tarmac Desert*.

Gardening is a very basic element of permaculture -- growing your own food creates a very direct and efficient relationship with your local web of nature, which will also recycle what you don't eat into compost to grow more. Reducing paid work to three days a week was a fundamental permaculture step for me: essentially, buying back time, which is the most limited resource in life. After all, what's the point of money if you haven't time to spend it on what you enjoy? Or, putting it another way, if you work at something you enjoy and earn money to pay others to do things you don't want to do, then you're getting good value for your time. But if you're not enjoying earning the money, or spend it paying others to do things that you'd rather do for yourself (eg, childcare, art and crafts, food-growing, jam-making), then employment is giving you bad value. Of course, being well-paid enough to contemplate the choice is a luxury -- but why hang on to more employment than you need and enjoy, rather than sharing the paying work with someone who may need it more?

Think globally, act locally

After so many years of telling others what they ought to be doing to save the world, I thought I jolly well ought to try putting my own good advice into practice locally. After all, every grand solution to the world's problems comes down to what can be made to work in millions of individual backyards and neighbourhoods.

Theorising about 'ought to' is, of course, much easier than reality. Transforming neglected local space into a nature haven means days spent picking it clear of years of accumulated trash, then more hours keeping it clear and knocking back rampant nettles, before you can start putting in interesting plants. And gardening is very much easier than dealing with actual people -- you put a plant in the ground, it either grows and flourishes or dies. Either way, you know where you are with it. People argue, aren't interested, are very ready to tell you all sorts of things you ought to do or not do, without being at all willing to do anything about whatever it is themselves. Back in March 1997, I had three local projects on the go -- the Old School garden, Local Agenda 21 and North London LETS.

The Old School garden has been the most frustrating. Talking to the church which owns the site, and getting the go-ahead for people to come in and garden the half-acre of land it was neglecting took all 1996. During 1997, we got onto actual gardening and made a flower-bed along one long boundary, planted daffodils and crocuses under the two mature cherry trees, cleared 6" thick litter all along its High Road wall, created a flowering shrub and woodland flowers bed, and kept on picking up litter. So far, so good.

But to develop, the garden needs to sprout information boards to tell the 8,300 or so people who use the bus stops alongside it each day what is happening there and how to get involved. It also needs work started on repairing the fences and gates around the site. And it needs a clear use lined up for the charming, listed Old School building once it's repaired, preferably as a base for an organisation which will be interested in hosting and working with a nature garden project. At the end of 1997, it had come to a hiatus, getting maintenance activity only.

The main discouragement has been disinterest from the church side. The new vicar, though keen to develop the Church's ministry in the community, has had to battle against internal feuding and coping with his own father's illness and death. He is at present the only person connected with the church who says 'thank you' to the volunteer gardeners who come in and clear up the church's grounds.

A livelier ally at present is the new Tottenham town centre manager, previously active in a number of community groups. He is currently talking with us and the bus garage opposite the Church about us taking on a patch of land alongside their building, and planting it up

for nature. Ever rashly optimistic, I've expressed willingness to expand the land-holdings of 'Tottenham Green Community Gardeners', currently a loose network of local ladies who enjoy getting together for a bit of gardening and a sociable cuppa afterwards. Next year? Watch this space.

Our Local Agenda 21 initiative has been almost as much trouble as reclaiming the Old School, but without the hands-on gardening as solid pay-back. At the Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992, the world's heads of state signed up to an Agenda 21; Chapter 28 of it said that all local governments would work with all sections of their communities to draw up Local Agenda 21 Sustainable Development Action Plans for the 21st century. In the UK, this has been taken up quite seriously in most communities. A spate of 'Rio 5 years on' conferences in mid-1997 rounded up experience so far.

Basically, the places where LA21 is working best had already started building independent environmental partnership trusts and forums, involving local community groups, businesses and the council. These independent partnership organisations have come up with a toolkit of ways ordinary people can have fun putting in their ideas about what should be done and how to do to make local life better for all. Where no such community partnership exists, 'LA21 plans' rushed together by councils talking to a few local activists sit on shelves as so much dead wood -- just another slab of worthy policy but without the broad involvement and interested backing to put it into practice. "If the local authority is seen as owning an LA21 process, then LA21 isn't working," discussions at Rio +5 review conferences rightly concluded.

In Haringey, there have been three council officers (1 half-time, one temporary, one conscientiously muddled) responsible for both LA21 and the council's own environmental policy. An LA21 forum of community activists has met roughly monthly since November 1996, as a sort of steering group but without a clear remit or clear membership. By January 1997, we'd worked out a strategy based on getting out to local groups as the first step in building a partnership to shape and act on a local sustainability action plan. In July 1997, frustrated that the strategy had neither been written down clearly for circulation to people who didn't get to the meetings, nor was being acted on by the Council staff who at present 'own' our LA21, a couple of us wrote it down, all 2 simple pages of it.

Meanwhile, I got talking to Voluntary Action Haringey about a community-led bid for 'regeneration' funding from the government it was putting together, to build community capacity towards sustainability. 'Sustainability' has become an all-purpose catchphrase -- to economists, it simply means not likely to go bankrupt, it is still used by many in that pre-Brundtland sense, rather than with an eye to ensuring that we don't bankrupt environmental and social capital and resource flows.

VAH wants to build an effective voluntary partnership to shape a sustainable Haringey; so does LA21 -- integrating the two could be the ideal answer. All we have to fear is internal politicking, processes, resource and time pressures, competing agendas and so on. Again: watch this space.

The third neighbourhood level project was the North London Local Exchange Trading System. For those who have recently joined our mailing list, or weren't paying attention a few issues back, LETS schemes are like cheque accounts in a local currency, with positive and negative balances created by members trading with each other -- the system should always balance at zero, with as many members below as above the zero line. With time on my hands after going part-time, I let Gilly, who's taken on the job of coordinator, talk me into producing the newsletter for our local LETS and being a neighbourhood contact to help new people settle in and start using the system. This, added to Joseph's 'ruthless tidying' and my garden advice call-outs, gives us a healthy LETS income. If it sits in my account, then my positive balance is keeping other members in negative balance, so the responsible thing is to spend it. A good LETS account is one with plenty of turnover, in and out, whatever the state of its current balance. So far, I've spent on hairdressing sessions, which produced far better haircuts than when I've paid money to have my hair mucked about; a massage or two; having a couple of shirts made up from material I've been hoarding; buying Xmas presents; and we regularly trade in plants, compost worms, lifts in cars and garden produce.

LETS is one way of drawing people together to make a sustainable local economy (it's not the only one, nor a magic solution to all economic ills). It's not a substitute for money, but supplements it -- enabling people to create an independent local economy by swapping skills, services and local produce or used goods. LETS systems tend to be rich in New Age alternative therapists, in computer buffs, DIYers, gardeners and dog-walkers. One problem of LETS systems is that many people who've heard about them and think them a good idea are content to talk about how useful they could be, in theory, and even if they join one never get around to using the system -- which makes them dead wood on its books.

Until 1996, NLETS was run by a couple of chaps who concentrated on keeping the trading accounts. Then Gilly took over as coordinator and concentrated on talking to people, sorting out problems, brokering trading contacts, and commissioning other people to do the work the system needs. This has brought it to life -- the essence of a LETS system is people getting together to trade in a sociable way.

Both the Old School nature garden and LA21 involvement started up as part of my local Friends of the Earth activities, and have taken on an independent life. Theoretically, I'm still Tottenham and Wood Green

Foe's transport and land use campaigner, and part of several FOE London networks. And Joseph is TWG FOE's air pollution campaigner and a star of the London FOE street theatre troupe -- having during 1996 "robustly, roundly, soundly and vigorously" acted as counsel for the defence in *The Car On Trial*, during 1997 he was author and director of *The Million Mile Meal*, playing soon at a supermarket near you. But FOE gets barely a look-in from me these days.

If you're tired of London...

Between the local and the national activities, there's the megalopolis in search of an identity. I came to London 14 years ago as a tourist, and still see it in that light: grand historic edifices blighted by traffic (except in the City's square mile, where anti-terrorist security provided the excuse for banning private cars). We live in what used to be a peripheral village, engulfed during London's 1870s railway age expansion. Our local borough, Haringey, encompasses what used to be eight separate villages, or three separate municipalities in the county of Middlesex, and has the population of a small city (200,000); it is one of 33 modern administrative boroughs.

During 1996, I went along to a seminar following up the publication of a *Creating a Sustainable London* manifesto, and got drawn into a couple of Sustainable London Trust working groups. One involved contributing news to *Green Events* newsletter, which tried to fulfil the need for a regular green/alternative newspaper for London. The other generated a proposal for how a London government should work in order to give London's people an active say in making London sustainably livable -- an ongoing Local Agenda 21 process for London.

Meanwhile, I'd also become a transport quango -- unfortunately of the old honorary mould rather than the new fat-cat model. When I retired from full-time work in 1995, I put my name forward for membership of the London Regional Passengers Committee, the statutory public transport watchdog for services in and around London. A mere year or so later, the Secretary of State for Transport took up my offer. LRPC is a conscientiously detailed body, which circulates a heavy reading load with a wealth of information about the ins and outs of buses and trains, amounting to a good foot so far of filing. So that was another two days a month of reading, responding and meetings in various parts of London -- LRPC puts its principles into practice by getting its members to sample the different parts of its territory. Being a member means that when I ask what is going on about buses and trains, I get detailed answers.

One network leads to another -- I got drawn into the steering group forming a new LETS-link London agency because of my links with NEF, NLETS and the Sustainable London Trust. LETSlink London (LLL) has

since about 1992 been one unpaid person putting out an occasional newsletter and answering inquiries about what is happening on LETS in London. The reborn LLL will be a charitable company, the sort of formal structure that government agencies and grant-giving trusts understand, aiming to pay a small staff (probably part-timers) to work on supporting and promoting LETS and similar schemes which can contribute to building sustainable local economies. This will mean coordinating information and answering inquiries, running courses, providing consultancy services, and instigating and promoting research and publication. As with NEF and Permaculture Association, being involved is a matter of helping a useful organisation grow and find its feet.

Covering the mortgage

So, what have I left out? Paid work, three days a week. During 1997, it was editing for the Commission for Racial Equality, a worthy quango with 200 staff and five regional offices. This meant being a relatively small cog in a big bureaucratic machine -- far less absorbing and satisfying than I've been used to. True, it gave me a thorough immersion in the ethnic minority perspective on life in Britain -- and I think the three years I was there saw a sea-change in the way race issues became seen by the wider world, a change from a black/white off-puttingly 'politically correct' issue to a colourful 'valuing diversity' multiculturalism. Much credit for this should go to Marjorie, the CRE's head of communications, who wrote for us in FTT 20.

At the end of 1997, I landed a new job -- policy co-ordinator (public affairs) with the National Centre for Volunteering. It is closer to home (Euston instead of Victoria), a nice informal sort of size (20 or so staff), and seems a jolly bunch of interesting people. So far, it's been pure fun -- nothing I enjoy more than looking at an issue or well-meaning proposal, trying to work out what problems are likely to arise and how to make things work as they should in real life. I see it as a sort of applied science fiction: you think of a character (or bunch of them) trying to grapple with the trend or situation in question, and imagine how they would act and react -- how they might 'hack' their way around

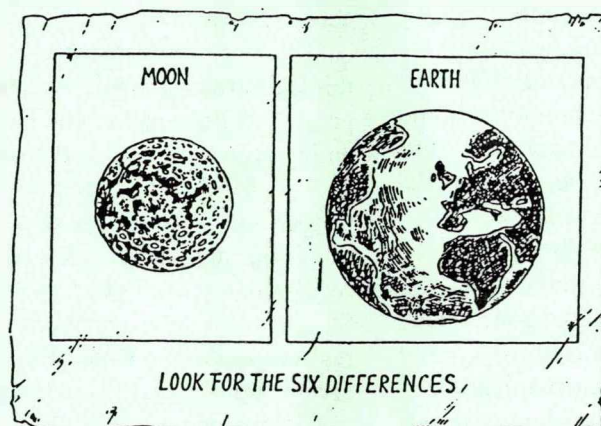
rules that get in their way, and how to set up a plot with a plausible happily utopian ending. Again, it's three days a week, so I can carry on my own variety of volunteering activities outside paid time. Flag-waving the social economic value of voluntary work is, I reckon, the big underlying issue for the Centre -- which connects neatly with my LETS and NEF involvements.

There's been time for an occasional spot of journalism (*Urban Transport International*, *Permaculture* magazine), and garden design consultancy for the Henry Doubleday Research Association, the UK's national organic gardening organisation. Quite a lot of varied permaculture-related activity, from keeping in touch with other London-based projects, giving talks and teaching, to producing policy position papers. Frivolous social and cultural life have been rather crowded out, I fear -- but all those meetings and networks bring their own social sub-cultures, their own kind of fandom and zines. No time for chasing after paying freelance jobs -- only if they come along in the line of what I'm busy with could I pick them up.

But a gal needs her frivolities. There's the *Secret Garden* apa, for instance. And while my little sisters have been embarking on the immensely demanding, expensive and time-consuming hobby of having babies, I've contented myself with buying a dolls house kit, a few small things to put in it (including a miniature treadle sewing machine and old-fashioned tin bath), a clutch of books on how to make dolls house stuff in meticulous 1/12 scale, and sent off for sample copies of the dolls house fanzines. Joseph much amused by me trying to grapple with miniature DIY. Must call up Chris Donaldson and see how hers is going... You know, I'm going to have to give up saving the world, which shows so little sign of wanting to be saved, to make time to play with my dolls house.

And this year, I must put more time into the garden and allotment, to keep Joseph fed in the style to which he has become accustomed -- lashings of gourmet organic veg, still squeaking fresh and alive. "Too many meetings, not enough gardening, dear," he utters reproachfully.

Must get the priorities straight.



LETTUCE

edited by Judith Hanna

Neil K Henderson
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It all becomes clear to me! FTT21 received and enjoyed and your incorporated subsidiary noted. Now I know why gardening magazines have to be requested in code at Knightswood Library, followed by a funny handshake and *sotto voce* insinuations about 'green fingers'. It's obviously all part of an insidious international conspiracy. In the potting sheds and greenhouses of the artificially warmed globe, little bands of dedicated people who 'know their onions', 'aren't as green as they are cabbage-looking' and are generally held to be the salt of the earth come together to plot the overthrow of stick-in-the-mud earthbound economies. The uprising will be slow, almost imperceptible, at first -- but when the winter of discontent gives way to the first shoots of recovery, and a plentiful dressing of pre-election verbal manure is applied, success will merely be a matter of digging for victory. *Horticulturalists of the World Unite! You have nothing to lose but your daisy chains!* Today, the world -- tomorrow the universe! The Day of the Triffids is at hand! (Note subtle SF reference.)

Bother -- now that you've told everybody, we're going to have to come up with another plan. Meanwhile, over to Gardeners' Question Time...

Vicki Rosenzweig
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NY 10034, USA

My local newspaper's garden column recently collected about 15 odd gardening facts for the entertainment of its readers, I suspect on the theory that nobody in the New York area is doing any actual gardening the week after New Year. One of these said that the dandelion has been declared an endangered wildflower in England. Is this really true -- I know better than to believe everything I read in the papers -- and if so, how did it happen? Many of my compatriots spend a lot of energy in usually futile attempts to eliminate dandelions from their lawns, for some unknown reason: the

flowers are pretty, the seedheads are great fun to play with, and the greens are nourishing.

I suspect the anti-dandelion feeling stems from the same root as the idea that clover doesn't belong in the lawn: to wit, a campaign by seed and lawn-care companies to get people to spend more money by promoting an artificial and very difficult standard. I do know someone who carefully uprooted dandelions because she was maintaining a native-wildflower garden, but that's a special and unusual case.

Is there a dandelion blight? Over-enthusiastic use of pesticides? Or did the columnist get it wrong?

If dandelions are endangered, no-one's told me, or the local dandelions, which appear to be as flourishing as ever. I'm sure Sue Thomason would know -- her first contribution to the Secret Garden apa was in praise of dandelions. Over here, a native wildflower garden should welcome them -- but I deduce they aren't one of the Americas' rich variety of indigenous compositae, many of which now grow wild over here. And right on cue, come in comrade...

Sue Thomason
190 Coach Road
Sleights, Whitby
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Basically, if you were serious about practising permaculture, you wouldn't start from 190 Coach Road. What

I need is a book that will tell me how to adapt a totally unsuitable house and garden into an eco-paradise, without making me get rid of my cats, keep chickens and eat vile greens. Not that I think all greens are vile, but the thing about growing lettuce is that you have to keep eating it, and it's never as nice as the stuff in the shop.

Most of our front lawn died last autumn (I think we cut it too late and it got too dry) so this is our big chance to do something revolutionary -- a Public Front-of-House Statement. I've always been reluctant to grow real veggies at the front of the house -- the garden gives onto a main road, which takes a lot of traffic in summer. So I'm looking at turning it

into a cottage garden type of low-maintenance butterfly and bee friendly jungle. With a patch of clover for sitting on.

Green additions to the household this autumn are a worm composting bin and a water butt. The worm bin is to replace tow composting tumblers that we never remember to tumble. One of them has been converted to a leafmould bin (ask me how successful this is in two years' time), the other is still taking most of our organic garden waste while the worm bin gets set up. The water butt is sitting in the living room until we can get Useful Rob to install it.

Our local LETS system is ticking over very slowly. Every so often I get irritated and try to do something to buck up interest in it, at which point the rest of the 'core group' dump on me for not calling a committee meeting to seek permission to blow my nose. I've told them if they don't like what I'm doing, I'll cheerfully hand over to someone else -- anyone else! -- but there are no takers.

I have a nasty feeling that all my 'green' stuff is too little, too late. Window-dressing, you know. That I'm not half radical enough really.

Perhaps you could train the local bees into a cadre of anti-traffic terrorists to create a traffic free exclusion zone around 190 Coach Road? And work with Dave Redd on training the worms to undermine the road foundations so that the earth can swallow the summer coaches and cars? As the permaculture maxim says 'the problem is the solution' - the more challenging your site, the more potential.

Just because you grow veges doesn't mean you have to eat them. You can leave them as snail and caterpillar food, let them flower and go to seed, so they come up like weeds next year, pull them up and compost them, or just dig them in as green manure. But chicory, rocket, salsify and leeks give better flower-head value. Spinach beet gives best value from self-sown seedlings, and Gertrud Franck's Companion Planting goes big on excess spinach as green manure. Do you trade your unwanted veges off to others on your LETS?

E B Frohvet
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'allotments' in the US, look what I find in the local newspaper. It's called 'community

So, on the very day that I sit down to write about how we don't have

gardening' and it apparently involves land which actually belongs to the county. However, Howard County is wealthy and progressive minded and has all sorts of things you don't find in other places. I have never encountered this anywhere else in the USA, which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, but it's unusual.

I've also been intrigued by news of New York's Green Guerrillas, who take over derelict vacant blocks and turn them into community gardens.. Urban guerrilla planting and gardening seems to go on in a quiet way in any city where land is being left waste by absent or neglectful landlords - who are often the public authorities. High profile outbursts, like The Land Is Ours occupation of the Guinness site beside the Thames in Wandsworth, London last year, are just the tip of an iceberg. EB has been sending us a regular supply of local news clippings on all sorts of aspects of reclaiming nature, walking trails, etc. Much appreciated.

Monika Best
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Germany

My balcony is the home of the Famous Tapdancing Turtle. I found it walking purposefully down the

road some time last summer, and took it in so it wouldn't get run over by a car. It must have escaped from some garden pond, but I never found out where it came from, so I kept it. I confess I didn't try very hard to find out where it came from. During the summer it lived on the balcony. I let it walk around free, and it had a tub of water it could bathe in, and even though I have to admit that I haven't actually caught it tapdancing yet, I'm impressed how fast it can run and how well it climbs. Seriously, I learned quite a lot about turtles; I'd no idea how fast they were or that they could climb at all. None of my houseplants were safe from it; it tried to climb into all the flowerpots, knocked down quite a few, and nibbled on some of the plants. Fortunately, it didn't eat the plants (turtles aren't vegetarians but mainly meat-eaters -- another thing I hadn't known), except for the parsley, which it seems to like a lot.

Intriguing... I wonder if they eat slugs and snails - but not froglings? Could a real live tortoise be what our back garden needs? (Dear?) Now, Monika - has your chelonian feet or flippers? I reckon you must have a tortoise (with feet), rather than a proper ocean-going turtle with flippers for

swimming through the oceans, or alternatively, the depths of space with four elephants and a Discworld balanced on its back.

Back to Gardeners' Question Time:

Austin Benson
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CB1 3AR

You must explain to me sometime how you manage to generate such a profusion of produce while rotating without getting dizzy -- or is that the trick? By the way, the water-lily or whatever it was you gave me at your last party seems to have adapted to my poorly managed pond. At least, there is something growing in it I don't remember seeing there before.

Judith's tale of growing up on a farm perhaps explains her industry in the garden and on the allotment. After making acres of the Australian bush bloom, it must feel like a rest cure. I, brought up with a suburban garden whose primary purpose seemed to be to require mowing so that I could earn extra pocket money, can't seem to summon the enthusiasm to look after 15 square feet of back-terrace.

Water hawthorn, comrade, Aponogeton distachyus, floating oval leaves, two-pronged white flower with twiddly bits and black markings, fragrant, spring and autumn, originates from South Africa, frost-hardy. Seed-pods said to be edible - when the stock in our big new allotment pond increases enough to yield a worthwhile meal, we'll try them and report back.

As you say, gardeners need to be notably well-balanced to handle the demands of rotating crops. All politicians, merchant wankers and computer programmers should be required to put in at least a half-day a week of digging and weeding, in order to ensure they maintain this important quality.

But you misunderstand the purpose of farming, which was not to make the land bloom but to subjugate the bush and the wildflowers and replace them with acres of dry, rain-repelling grass and sheep.

Dale Speirs
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Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2P 2E7

On reading 'Out in the Sticks', I marvelled at how similar Judith's Australian farm upbringing was to my childhood in rural Alberta. We had Charolais beef cattle instead of sheep, and *Cypripedium*

acaule orchids (lady slippers) instead of spider orchids, but those are details; the big picture is much the same. As with you, our mother could chase us out of the house and let us work off our energy exploring the poplar bluffs or building tree forts. Arguments around our dinner table were mostly political, as Dad was a Social Credit man, and discussing economics and monetary reform with his kids was quite ordinary. Our houses weren't renovated much, but Dad built clinics (he was a farm-animal veterinarian) the way other people might repaint a house. The final farm he had before his death had two clinics; one of my childhood memories is playing amongst the concrete foundations of whatever clinic or barn he was currently building.

Sheryl Birkhead
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Gaithersberg
MD 20882, USA

We moved to the farm because my father had been raised on one and wanted his kids raised that way. Mom was city through and through but got into it -- of course, at that point my father was largely out of the country on business.

Alan Sullivan
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Stratford
London E15 1HL

Farming, as you describe it, sounds almost idyllic. True, it's hard, labour-intensive physical work, running a small 'family' farm. That said, each landowner is their own boss. The neighbours, unusually in the same position, have more 'community spirit' -- they find co-operation to be more advantageous than all-out competition (well, that's one theory, anyhow). Careful management (and a dose of good luck) can see you through.

It never ceases to amaze me, the extent to which childhood upbringing influences adult perspectives. I grew up wondering why my parents always seemed to be on the brink of physical collapse, why they never had the energy to do the things other people did, and above all why everyone else seemed to have so much more money than us. Nowadays, I look back and understand that hard physical labour, ill health and daily commuting for all too little pay burned my father out -- and my mother too, trying to hold things together. I understand how conveniently (for the local authority) we fell between two financial stools -- too poor to do other than scrape by (low income, high expenses) but too 'wealthy' (mortgage holders, living in Essex, a 'decent' area then) to qualify for aid.

Even the council house kids were better off than us. In short, broken by a corrupt and evil system, still in force, which will continue under the next regime -- they don't call him Tony Bland for nowt.

Yes, your first paragraph sums up the attraction of farming -- being your own boss (setting aside banks, the vagaries of drought, flood, fire and unseasonable rain, and global commodity prices). Living on the land, provided you can put in the work, you can grow much of what you need to live off -- so that what money you have goes further. We took on the farm during a rural depression, and were refused Government aid because the farm was judged 'unviable'. Mum and Dad weathered it out, with the taxmen querying the accounts because, they said, a family couldn't live on as little as we'd put down for household expenses. But we had the land to grow our own veges, fruit, eggs and meat; Mum used the traditional housewifely skills of making our own clothes (including jumpers hand-spun and machine-knitted from our own sheep's wool). The farm was a resource base that allowed our quality of life to be less affected by shortage of cash money. In cities, where so little is available except for money, poverty bites harder. At least, if you try to live respectably and conventionally.

But then, what I find among the many young unemployed people involved in LETS and permaculture schemes is that they find resources in the wasteful big city that they exploit imaginatively and cheaply to make their own freedom, comforts and satisfactions, in the face of the still real insecurities and inconveniences that being without money entails.

JHarking further back:

Fred Lerner
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Vermont 0500, USA

I gather that you spent part of your childhood on Manus Island. All I know of the place is from a television

programme that I saw about twenty-five years ago, which traced Margaret Mead's return in later life to the place where she did much of her fieldwork as a young anthropologist. I still remember one haunting scene from that documentary. A group of children circled a tall, phallic monument, chanting some eerie heathen tune. After a minute or two, the camera panned upward, revealing an Australian flag at the top of the wooden pole. Then I recognised this ancient ceremony: it was the beginning of the school day

and the children were singing 'God Save the Queen'. The Empire still lived! (And as Papua New Guinea is still a monarchy, with HM the Queen as its head of state, perhaps the school day on Manus still begins that way.)

I see from browsing through my files that the 'Alien Landscapes' piece in which I wrote about growing up in Niugini and Australia for John Jarrold's Prevert 10 was way back in September 1984. Let me know if you want reminiscences on it.

Stephen O'Kane
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Furze Hill
Hove, BN3 1NJ

I never meant to suggest in my previous letter that any of the neo-Darwinists ignore the fact of co-operation for survival, although the

co-operation will sometimes be against outsiders, or predators, or for hunting purposes. Sadly, ideologists of both left and right frequently fail to understand that competition and co-operation are not mutually exclusive -- they occur together in varying degrees. That applies in human society as well as biology, with the result that attempts to eliminate or ignore either are quite unreal. I worry that educationalists, amongst others, have no idea of a healthy balance between the two. At the same time, co-operation with others in our daily lives is not sufficient to prevent us competing for status, and in turn is no guarantee that we would go along with sharing jobs rather than maximising incomes.

Vicki Rosenzweig

Even if we're predisposed to compete

for status, there are many ways for a society to confer it. Just within the culture in which I was raised, the ways to attain status include having money, being a good athlete, being educated ('Dr Jones' is still likely to get better treatment than 'Ms Jones', even if her degree isn't in medicine), being attractive, running something important, writing a well-known book, being a priest or rabbi or minister, having artistic skills, and being the parent or spouse of someone who achieves any of these. (This is just off the top of my head, and I'm sure I've left things out.) Similarly, while there's only one Queen of Britain or President of the United States at any given time, there's status to be had in local positions, in running any number of things well, or in being -- say -- a good guitarist if you don't have a platinum album. The real difficulty may be in

trying to measure your status in terms of the billions of people you've never met or heard of, rather than in terms of the overlapping communities -- geographical, political, family, professional, hobby, religious, and so on -- that you're part of. It's easy to make fun of the "big fish in a small pond" thing, but I think it's healthier to be that than say it isn't enough to be on a winning amateur sports team, or a local bridge champion, or someone who bakes bread that everyone she knows enjoys: you have to be a professional athlete, preferably for the world champion team, or the best bridge player in the world, or sell bread professionally for that achievement to be worth anything. It's fine to keep trying to improve -- to look for new recipes or techniques, or to practice so as to get better at what you do -- but that is, or should be, very different from thinking that unless you're the absolute best at something it's worthless. That your fifth novel will probably be better than your first doesn't mean you shouldn't try to publish the first, or that you should count on the fifth being more popular.

I have no problem with E B Frohvet's use of a pseudonym: after all, not only is reinventing oneself an important ability, but I have no good way of convincing many of my correspondents that I'm really who I say I am, or of knowing that they're really who they say they are. I only wish that Frohvet would stop using the editorial 'we' when referring to actions or ideas which are clearly only those of one person. In a piece like his travelogue, I kept wondering whether this 'we' meant that Frohvet and her/his significant other (a wonderfully ambiguous term) have *both* recently moved to the Baltimore area and had a long-standing interest in history. Was our author wandering the site alone, or in company? But to me, it seems entirely reasonable that the historic original structure at Fort McHenry was torn down after the battle: the military is, reasonably, concerned more with an adequate defence than with maintaining old fortifications. Besides, in 1815 'The Star-Spangled Banner' had yet to attain fame and official status.

Steve Brewster
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I liked E B Frohvet's little guide to Fort McHenry. The quote from General Ross -- 'I will dine tonight in

Baltimore or in Hell!' -- reminds me of the Culinary Theory of British Military Supremacy, which states that the great Empire-builders of yore sought their fortunes abroad not so much to

bring glory on the nation as to get away from its food. Likewise, Johnny Foreigner refrains from invading us because he knows we don't cook or grow anything worth eating.

Lloyd Penney
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Canada

Discussions between Americans and Canadians about the War of 1812 are usually as inconclusive as the war itself, but much

more entertaining. Sometimes, we hear the claim that the United States has won every war it was in right up to Vietnam (and some claim it wasn't a war but a 'police action', so doesn't count). Us smug C'najans smile and ask about the War of 1812, an encounter that neither side really won, and most US citizens ask what that war was. (Some even ask what year it was fought -- like asking who'd buried in Grant's Tomb.) Perhaps it didn't count, either, not enough to be included in American school texts.

Which observation is slightly contradicted by:

Austin Benson

E B Frohvet's article was highly diverting --

other nationality's views of their history usually are, I find. There was a discussion (on rec.arts.sf.fandom, I think) of an American's outrage on discovering that to the British 1812 meant (if anything at all) Napoleon, we having conveniently forgotten anything else going on at the time. Perspective is everything.

Further to the thread on non-standard life patterns, even where it ought to be possible to split jobs on the basis of type of work involved, the bureaucratic resistance seems ridiculously strong. A member of my team, having reached the point where he is being paid more than adequately for his simple tastes, would like to go part-time to pursue his charitable and leisure activities. The work concerned would be easily adapted by adjusting schedules and project plans, as is evidenced by the fact that the department has coped and is coping quite happily with women coming back part-time after maternity leave (and there definitely seems to be something sexist there). But the department manager refuses to consider it, muttering about administration costs and administrative overheads making it unjustifiable. I suspect we'll keep the member in question, simply because all other companies in the field are likely to react in the same way, but if he ever finds a more enlightened

employer we'll have lost an experienced team-member because of insufficient flexibility.

Pamela Boal
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I find the discussion of shared work the most interesting subject, but it is not only single men and women who would

be unable to pay rent or mortgage with income from shared employment. Many couples find it had to get by on two full-time wages. Then there is the problem of low wages, and the people who need to work not only full-time but overtime for a living wage.

The sort of work mentioned in *FTT* may well be suitable for sharing, but how many manual, unskilled or semi-skilled jobs could be shared? While the situation may have improved during the past decade, we are way behind other European countries when it comes to the proportion of our population having any sort of education beyond the age of sixteen. Then of course there is the disincentive of our benefits system. While Judith's article didn't mention non-family workers other than the one-eyed builder, she did mention seasonal changes. There is seasonal work in this country, and not only in farming, and although there are people willing to do that type of work but not to take full-time employment, it means coming off social security payments and having to wait six weeks with no income after the job has finished before signing on again.

Sharing such jobs as can be shared will not, alas, help the many or reduce unemployment; it will merely enable the few to have a more leisured (or fulfilled by more meaningful-to-them activity) if lower income lifestyle. At least now that some progress has been made in pension and holiday rights for part-time workers, people sharing work need not worry that their will be reclassified as part-time. Nevertheless, a great deal of thought would have to be put into sharing paid employment fairly between a country's working population. It could be that it is not possible to share any more than formerly communist countries fairly shared goods and income.

D M Sherwood
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There seems something retrogressive about your embracing of the back to nature lark and even (to a certain extent) LETS

schemes. For me, grubbing about in a field and/or fixing a neighbour's roof in exchange for

her doing my accounts is, no matter what golden glow may be shone over it, part of the medieval shite that Rational Scientific Civilisation, the Technocratic Worldview if you will, promised to get us out of. It may be that it can't be so, but I'm not willing to give up on the hope considering the reality of the alternatives. Youse lot are apparently consenting adults.

George Flynn
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Mass 02142, USA

I'm in a curious position with respect to the talk of part-time work. I'm a proofreader in a pre-press shop. When I started in 1983, it was a typesetting house, and we had three full-time proofreaders. Now, most of our customers do their own typesetting in-house, and there's not enough left for one full-time person. But what there is is sufficiently unpredictable (and urgent) that I have to be available all the time. To be sure, they have me do various sorts of other work, but even so I have nothing to do much of the time. So I have a full-time (and full-paid) job with only part-time work, and I can do most of my fanac at the office. Very strange, and probably too good a deal to last indefinitely.

Joseph's essay on death was impressively written, but I have no coherent response.

Austin Benson

The view of disease as something to be

confronted and overcome that Joseph complains of in Connie Willis's *The Doomsday Book* may be intellectually old-fashioned, but is generally still very strong. The reaction to BSE is a case in point, with people demanding that the government *do* something and professing outrage that scientists didn't do all sorts of research ten years ago (when the grounds for supposing that the research was necessary were not strong enough to divert the needed funds and effort from other, more immediately threatening conditions such as HIV) so that we could have found a cure by now. We seem to me to be less fatalistic now about such things than ever before, due to the fact that in the second quarter of this century we did start to be able to reliably cure diseases, having figured out how to prevent many of them in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and are now outraged at the thought that we might be vulnerable to anything at all!

Stephen O'Kane

The idea that science, or its application through

technology, means progress seems to have withered away, and we are back to the 'dismal science' of Malthus -- from whom both Marx and Darwin drew many of their ideas. Whether that means we will be more humble, or simply compete more fiercely for the position of top megalomaniac, remains to be seen. What I am sure of is that we will not abandon technology, or its creative (and destructive) powers. As the Antibiotic Age ends, we will look for other (maybe more environmentally friendly) techniques to replace it.

Jackie Duckhawk
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The custom of laying out relatives in the front room is far from a nineteenth century tradition. My father remembers seeing the corpses of his little sisters when he was a boy in the 1930s. Later still (though as an adult) my father-in-law says he rather appreciated the chance to have a private chat with his dead father, leaving his mother and sister to argue in the kitchen. When my mother-in-law died recently, he seriously considered doing the same with her, but the possibility that if the spare bedrooms ran out someone might have to sleep over on the sofa made this impractical.

Neil K Henderson

Joseph's article put me in mind of a visit I made in the blistering summer of 1995 to Glasgow Necropolis, situated near the Cathedral. Standing on a steep hill, it is approached from Cathedral Square by the Bridge of Sighs (1833). My *Glasgow At A Glance* mentions a Jews' enclosure, Catacombs and Egyptian Vaults -- but so much is now neglected, and marked with DANGER -- UNSAFE signs, that I didn't find these. (There is a huge door opposite the bridge, which is sealed off and which may be the catacomb entrance, but I'm not sure.) There would appear to be much in common with Kensal Green Cemetery, given the Victorian date. Again, there is a predominance of once-opulent mausolea (or mausoleums, as we say in English) for wealthy self-important big shots (deceased). Everywhere there are bold statements of ownership of this or that bit of land -- as though the greed and acquisitiveness of these magnates is trying to extend beyond death and keep hold of their earthly property till the Last Trump blows. You might not be able to take it with you, but if you pay enough you can stop anyone else getting what you leave behind. In stark contrast, as I was

exploring one of these monuments, I went inside one which was lying open. I was preoccupied with some fine vaulting on the ceiling, and it was only as I turned to leave that my gaze lowered to the floor, to see a sleeping bag neatly laid out, with a copy of the previous day's *Sunday Mail* folded on top. *Somebody was sleeping in this mausoleum.* I felt like an intruder, as I tiptoed out. I suppose there's some poetic justice that someone was getting rent-free use of a grandee's posthumous status symbol, but one can't avoid "Great Divide" style comparisons.

Joseph's piece mentioned Brunel's *Great Eastern*. Another Great Eastern can be glimpsed from the Glasgow Necropolis hill -- the Great Eastern Hotel, a monumental doss-house (once 'respectable' working men's accommodation) which is just about the end of the line for those people society wants to forget about. I don't know who built it, but he's probably interred in the Necropolis.

The only 'genuinely famous' person I saw commemorated was John Knox. He's not actually buried there (he's in Edinburgh, I think), but has a statue on a huge Nelson-style column right at the summit of the lofty hill. Some of Glasgow's famous offspring (particularly in the field of medicine) lie in the Cathedral grounds -- and as with Kensal Green, their monuments are fairly unassuming (though no doubt they have big bits of the university named after them).

The rest of the article was also interesting. Several species of fish which are normally restricted to more southern waters have been spotted off the British coast. As for outbreaks of plague, apparently bubonic plague still exists in the USA -- in New Mexico, near where the nuclear bomb was tested. I heard on the radio of someone's dog exhibiting plague symptoms, but he just took it to the vet for antibiotics, and it recovered in three weeks. By the way, just to be nitpicking, wasn't the 1994 outbreak in India *pneumonic* plague, rather than *bubonic*? That's more worrying, because it can spread orally, rather than from insect bites.

We Also Heard From

Andy Andruschak ("Los Angeles is home to the Forest Lawn cemeteries, and for sheer bad taste I think Forest Lawn could beat Kensal Green hands down. If you have never been to any of the Forest Lawns, do so when you visit the LA area. You will then be able to read *The Loved One* with a better sense of the story.") **Chester Cuthbert** (*reiterating his arguments about the*

economics of abundance, which we agree with -- and ran in FTT15) **Leigh Edmonds** ("I got a little chuckle out of your quote about Quality Assurance. I have written about the business of QA and TQM in my history of Western Australia's Main Roads Department and again in the work I'm doing on the sand mining industry. The thing about QA is not that it guarantees quality, but that it is supposed to guarantee you get what you pay for. This only means that the word quality has been devalued to mean 'standard'.") **Susan Francis** (who sent a list of the muses invented by the newsletter team at the 1997 Eastercon) **Jack Hanna Bridget Hardcastle Teddy Harvia** ("I find it interesting that in another age hippos swam in the Thames and lions roamed the moors. Perhaps some of your ancestors were trampled or eaten." *But not, of course, before they'd reproduced the next generation.*) **Steve Jeffery** ("You really went to town on the Fearfully Transposing Titles, didn't you?") **Dave Langford** ("Hazel sends thanks for the language snippet which Joseph recently mailed to her, and on this account forgives him for outraging her sensibilities by writing 'necropolii' rather than 'necropoles'.") **Robert Lichtman Eric Lindsay** ("I negotiated ten years ago that my 35 hour a week job be done on four days a week, in self-defence. Computer people rarely get away on time, due to yet another crisis, so it seemed to me much better to not be there one day a week. So far it has worked pretty well.") **Perry, Robyn & Catherine Middlemiss Murray Moore** ("In the last issue I mentioned I interviewed an Englishman who was walking from the tip of South America to Alaska. Since then I have read his book, *The Longest Walk*, by George Meegan of Rainham, Kent. After reading it, I just had to read *Wheelbarrow Across The Sahara*. Geoffrey Howard, a parish priest from Manchester, decided to walk from Beni Abbes, Algeria, to Kano, Nigeria, through '2000 miles of the harshest terrain in the world', pushing a Chinese sailing wheelbarrow. The English have

an undeserved reputation for being eccentric.") **Par Nilsson** (with a CoA to Redbergsv 7A, 41665 Goteborg, Sverige) **Derek Pickles** ("I have two 100% successful treatments for all gardening problems. The first is to have a heart attack and then you can't do any gardening. The second, permanent, treatment is a large load of ready-mixed concrete." *If it weren't that so many people in this densely built over area do apply your second treatment, Derek, I'd find the joke funnier -- as it is, it's a sensitive issue. Love your weeds -- think of them as wildflowers, is one of my campaign cries.*) **David Redd** ("As a C.Eng.MICE building bypasses, I suppose I'm a Fundamentalist Terrorist Theodolite of the extreme right. 'Flaccid Tomato Towers'? Is this possible?" *One of the legends of Joseph's childhood is the time his mother turned a lavish tomato crop into 'tomato castles' of cold wobbly tomato flavour jelly. It ranks with the spinach puree soup I served one day, which Joseph poked at, pushed away, and christened 'cowpat soup'.*) **Yvonne Rousseau and John Foyster** ("Thank you for Fifty Thousand Titles") **Andy Sawyer** ("...far too involved in cataloguing obscure Czech novels...") **DM Sherwood Again** ("It's been 2 issues now that you've WAHFed me gotta break the habit soon or I'll begin to think you dont care. Well #21 is a pretty mediocre issue nothing to comment on really...") **Alex Slate** ("Chooks? = Chickens?" *Correct.*) **Walt Willis** ("I remember that my fear of death was considerably relieved by Kingsley Amis in *Jake's Thing*. He pointed out that people like me are really worried about two diametrically opposed contingencies: one, that there is no afterlife and, two, that there is. Once we have accepted that there is no afterlife, there is, literally, nothing to be afraid of. I have found this latter thought a great comfort, though I admit I miss the possibility of being awakened every thousand years to be informed of how things are going with humanity.") **Henry L Welch**



LIVE AND LET DIE

Joseph Nicholas

I read Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs And Steel: The Fates Of Human Societies* in May 1997, and although there were still seven months to go, I knew then that it would be my personal Book Of The Year -- huge in scope and concept, overflowing with ideas and insight, a genuine contribution to human knowledge and understanding.

Diamond's book is nothing less than an explanation of why European civilisation was destined to outrun and overcome all others, solely by virtue of its geographical origins. We were, literally, in the right place at the right time, and therefore had a head start over any other society which might eventually have been in contention for global dominance. As the world emerged from the fourth of the Quaternary glaciations, our ancestors in the Near East found themselves with access to the largest and most readily domesticable number of plants and animals (of the 56 most important species of grass, for example, 33 are native to southern Anatolia and the Fertile Crescent), which by providing the early pastoralists with annual food surpluses relieved society of the need to be constantly hunting for sustenance and thus allowed it the opportunity to for the first time pursue non-agricultural interests -- technical innovations such as building in brick and stone, smelting metals, developing pottery, weaving, and writing; and cultural innovations such as the evolution of specialist classes of warriors, priests, bureaucrats and rulers who were supported by the labour of others. In addition, the fact that our Near East ancestors lived in such close proximity with their animals meant that they also acquired their diseases -- and thus in time the resistance to them which other peoples elsewhere in the world lacked, such as the smallpox without which Europeans may never have overcome superior Indian numbers in the Americas. Finally, Diamond points out that the east-west orientation of Europe meant that a plant or animal domesticated in one part of the sub-continent could be easily transported to another, because it would remain within the same temperate climatic zone -- whereas the north-south orientation of the Americas and Africa rendered such transportation impossible, since a move of any significant distance would entail a change of climatic zone.

Thus, whereas by 5000BCE the crops and livestock first domesticated in the Fertile Crescent had spread throughout much of Europe, the crops and livestock domesticated in the Andes never spread to the highlands of Mexico, where they would have been equally at home, because they would first have had to traverse the hot intervening lowlands of Central America. Similarly, Europe's east-west orientation encouraged the spread of people, and thus also enabled the rapid transmission and adoption of cultural and technical ideas -- whereas the Americas' and Africa's north-south orientation worked against such cross-fertilisation by confining civilisations to particular localities.

By around 1500AD, Diamond suggests, the civilisations of the Americas and Africa had reached a point at which, had they been left alone for another few hundred years, they might have embarked on a more rapid process of technical and cultural development, which would in time have brought them to the same level as Europe. But by then it was too late: Europe had reached the point of global take-off, and set out to remake the world in its own image.

Diamond's argument -- a synthesis of biology, ecology, history and linguistics -- is that this was inevitable. What his argument also does, although he's probably not aware of it, is write a giant *finis* to one of science fiction's favourite sub-genres: alternate history. No longer, for example, can we read of -- and more importantly, believe in -- a world in which Aztec civilisation is dominant, as described in Robert Silverberg's *The Gate Of Worlds* and Christopher Evans's *Aztec Century*, because we know that the Aztecs did not have access to the relevant package of plants and animals, and hence the range of disease resistance and the level of technology, which would have allowed them to triumph. If we want to play with alternates now, we have to restrict ourselves to the contingencies of our own world's history-- for example, suppose the morale of the French army had collapsed in early 1917, as the British then feared? With the British unable to carry on alone, would the Kaiser have been able to arrange a truce on the Western front which would have made it unnecessary to send Lenin to Moscow in a sealed train because the German war effort

could have been redirected to the east, rolling up the Kerensky government? Or, reaching further back into history, suppose the Byzantines and the Sassanians had not fought each other to a standstill in the first half of the seventh century AD -- without the political and economic vacuum which then opened up, might the early Islamic conquests have been more hard won, and the religion thus less easily spread (or even not spread out of the Near East at all?). The Byzantine Empire would have retained control of Christian Syria and the Levant, the Crusades would never have taken place, Western Europe might never have assumed the leading role it later did. Or let's go further back still, and suppose that plague hadn't struck Syracuse, in Sicily, when it was under siege by the Romans in 212BCE -- would it then have been able to see off the besiegers, would the Greek colonists have allowed the Carthaginians to resupply Hannibal's armies in Italy, and would the Roman Republic have therefore been extinguished before it could spread beyond its homeland? As Norman Davies remarks in *Europe: A History*, post-Alexandrian Greece was then oriented much more towards the East, and had it not been incorporated into the Romans' Mediterranean world European interests could have become subordinate to those of Asia -- but in any event, a Europe without Rome would have been very different.

One can have all kinds of fun with contingencies like these: history is littered with them. (But I'm not going to list any more, since that would be tantamount to giving away story ideas for free. I shall certainly want a share of the royalties if either of the first two turn up under someone else's name!) Not just recorded human history either: evolution demonstrates again and again the sheer randomness by which some species are selected for survival while others are not. Take the Cambrian "explosion" of around 550million years ago, for example: a variety of different body-forms were tried out in a (geologically) very short span of time before, for reasons we still don't understand, most were swept away, never to re-appear in the biological record. One which survived was *pikaia gracilens*, a small ribbon-like chordate from which all vertebrate life is descended. Or consider, for another example, the mass extinction which marked the end of the Permian period, 250million years ago, as the continents converged to form Pangea and set off a period of global warming, to the detriment of 95% of the life then on Earth. The most important survivor was the *lystrosaur*, a lizard-like pig-creature which looked like a reptile and was

struggling to become a mammal, and whose fleshy snout enabled it to dig out vegetation which other herbivores could not; and as the other herbivores died out, so did their predators, leaving it to become the temporary ruler of the world. In time, it evolved into a small rodent, scurrying through the undergrowth as the lizards which had survived along with it evolved into the dinosaurs; and when they became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous, 65million years ago, its descendants turned into squirrels, then lemurs....and, later, monkeys and primates. Without the *lystrosaur*, in other words, there would be no humans, because there would have been no mammals. Yet there was nothing predictable about any of these changes, these survivals: it simply had the luck to be in the right place at the right time. As, a long time later, were the Europeans.

But which species will survive the current mass extinction, the sixth such to have been inflicted on the Earth, which human disruption of the world's ecosystem(s) seems to have set in train?

The key word here is biodiversity -- a concept often defended on the grounds that a world with lots of species in it is more interesting and aesthetically pleasing than one with only a few; but the real argument for biodiversity is that without it more complex life forms such as humans cannot survive. Theory used to argue that a world which contained only a few species, but large populations of those species, would be more ecologically stable than one with small populations of many species -- but in fact the latter is the more stable, simply because there is more scope for redundancy: some species can be lost without much effect on the whole. With fewer species, the ecosystem is more tightly interlocked: lose one, and the rest will follow shortly after -- even, indeed especially, where the species inter-relationships are not immediately obvious. For example, elephants used to be thought of a threat to the baobab trees of East Africa, ripping open their trunks in times of drought to get at the wet pulp within, and were culled for that reason; now, however, it is recognised that without elephants to periodically break up the tree cover and create new habitats for antelope and zebra, their numbers will go into decline -- so the resumption of the ivory trade means more than just the impending extinction of the African elephant. But if we understand this, what we don't understand is what effect global warming will have on the invertebrate life on which the world as a whole depends for pollination, soil aeration, decomposition, and all

the other unglamorous but vital activities which sustain the biosphere. People speculate about the possible appearance of malaria-carrying mosquitoes in southern England as existing climatic zones shift north or south (depending on the hemisphere -- and assuming that existing ocean currents remain unchanged instead of, say, the Labrador Current pushing further south into the North Atlantic and redirecting the Gulf Stream away from northern Europe, leaving Britain with a climate more appropriate to its latitude) -- but what about the humble earthworm?

That the world is gradually warming up is not in dispute amongst the scientific community (the exceptions are largely cranks, backed by the US oil industry and Arab oil-exporting nations); the question is how much of this warming is due to human activity and how much due to natural fluctuation in the Earth's climate. James Lovelock, author of the Gaia hypothesis, argues that it is human-induced, but attributable less to excess CO₂ emissions than to destruction of the tropical forests which would otherwise absorb greenhouse gases; others argue that the warming is a rebound from a previous cool period, namely the Little Ice Age of 1450-1850. If Lovelock is correct, then the case for preventing further logging in the Amazon and Indonesia is immeasurably strengthened; if it's natural, then there's little we can do to prevent it -- although a late nineteenth century commencement date for this warming is persuasively congruent with the lag to be expected as the CO₂ which began to be pumped out at the onset of the Industrial Revolution finally made itself felt. Nevertheless, making every effort to reduce further CO₂ emissions in order not to exacerbate any natural warming strikes me as plain common sense -- although there wasn't much of that in evidence at the Kyoto conference last December, and the agreement which resulted is scarcely worth the paper on which it's printed. Its central aim is the trading of emissions permits; but the whole purpose of this is to allow the USA to continue with its present wasteful and inefficient energy practices by purchasing future emissions from developing nations, which will quite rightly see this as a block to their future progress and thus refuse ratification. In any case, even if the USA hadn't retreated from its 1992 promise of real cuts sooner or later to its present vague promise of cuts at some unspecified future date, it's unlikely that an agreement with any substance would get past the US Congress, in hock to economic arguments about jobs and growth which on closer examination are quite specious. As many jobs

would be created in new energy and transport industries as would be lost in the old ones; commercial history shows that clinging to established practices and failing to innovate is the surest route to commercial extinction (which means that within the next few decades the USA will find itself de-industrialising as it begins to lose markets for its products); and US industry's complaints that an agreement on global warming would render it uncompetitive are merely special pleading for its failure to adopt the same energy efficiency as other industrial countries: the high cost of now catching up is entirely self-inflicted. But by the middle of the next century these arguments will be largely academic, as the inertial effects of the additional CO₂ already present in the atmosphere ensure a warmer world irrespective of what the USA may then, too late, be forced to do.

On the other hand, the fate of every species is to become extinct sooner or later -- so why not us? As evolutionary biologist Colin Tudge has remarked, evolution likes to clear the stage from time to time, to allow a fresh spurt of diversification and experimentation; we may just be the agent of the current clear-out. *Homo sapiens* and its predecessors have had around five million years on Earth, which in comparison with other complex life-forms is quite long (the average life-span for any species is ten to thirteen million years, but of course most species are much less complex than us); further, our species is now the sole survivor of what was once a rather more diverse human family, the other members having died out when their particular ecological niches were closed off. (It's now generally understood that, far from *homo sapiens* supplanting *neanderthal*, the two shared the world -- albeit living in different parts of it -- for several tens of thousand of years until the end of the Quaternary, when the latter died out because it was not suited to the climatic conditions which have prevailed since. In addition, some intriguing evidence has recently been uncovered that pockets of *homo erectus* may still have existed in East Asia until as late as thirty thousand years ago -- which seems to me to give added weight to the "out-of-Africa" theory of human origins: i.e., they were pushed there -- pushed aside -- by their more adaptable cousins.) So if it's time to go...

This sort of thing is doubtless anathema to the extropians and others who believe in life beyond "the spike" -- a period sometime in the next century when it is presumed that the pace of technological innovation will become so rapid that the graphical curves by which it is measured become vertical, and we reach the cyberpunk holy

grail of being able to download our consciousnesses into computers and set off for the stars with a cargo of DNA and an attitude. Frankly, I think this "spike" is mere SF wish-fulfilment -- for one thing, it assumes that the pace of technological change characteristic of the past fifty years will simply be replicated into the future; for another, it forgets that any useable new technology or technological development is pre-figured by theoretical papers and experimental models long before any physical prototype appears, meaning that nothing can emerge unheralded in the manner the curves try to suggest; and thirdly, and most unforgivably, the spike's proponents are confusing the increasing speed of computer processors with the development of artificial intelligence, and assuming that the one will automatically result in the latter. (One might as well argue a similar case from the existence of idiot savants, on the grounds that since they can add up long strings of numbers they too must be very clever.) Never mind that we don't even know what consciousness is, and thus have no means of measuring it, so the suggestion that we shall be able to copy it into computer memory and become immortal is preposterous nonsense. Indeed, the whole "spike" scenario seems to me little more than an attempt to cheat the inevitable by once again pretending that the human species is not a biological accident but one that stands apart from and above the world, separate from nature, the literal pinnacle of evolution (although anyone who believes that must also believe in a creator of some sort, since without such external intervention it would be impossible to direct or manipulate evolution to produce a desired result). This is not just nonsense, but nonsense in spades.

We've been through this subject in *FTT 19* and some of the letters in the succeeding issue, but it's worth repeating the point that, much as we might like to survive as a species, the odds are against it. Similarly, the odds are against any successor species being as intelligent as ours -- the brain is a very energy-hungry organ, and when the evolutionary pressure is on, biological imperatives could well decide that the higher cerebral functions are dispensable. This would be a great pity -- just as we reach the point at which

we begin to fully understand ourselves and our world, we discover that our time is up -- but evolution, as Colin Tudge has also remarked, cannot look forward to see what might be of use in the future, such as big brains, good hand-eye co-ordination, and ability to form spoken language: it can only respond to the contingencies of the present. So the answer to the question of which species will survive the mass extinction we've initiated is that we can't possibly tell -- except to say that a less biodiverse world means that the more complex life-forms are the most likely to disappear.

Heigh-ho, heigh-ho -- it's off to fossilise we go....but before we do, let's pause for another look at *Guns, Germs And Steel* and its argument that the European conquest of the world was inevitable. Doesn't this argument rather undermine the ideas of history as a series of contingencies, and if so how do we reconcile the two viewpoints?

Without too much difficulty, it seems to me. Contingency determines who or what is present or has survived when initial conditions are established; then, as the various possibilities inherent in those conditions are unfolded (or ignored), certain inevitabilities begin to appear as some avenues are closed off and others opened up. Had the human species emerged a few million years earlier, or a few million years later, it would have encountered a slightly different geography, and hence a different climate and ecology; and hence a different range of possibilities. In our timeline, the Europeans have come to dominate the world; in another, the outcome could well be different. (How different is perhaps a challenge for an SF novelist: to create an alternate history based on a different geography -- not a fantasy geography, but a picture of the Earth's shifting continental masses at a different period in its history. It would require more work and more thought than "ordinary" alternative histories -- but the results could be very rewarding, both imaginatively and intellectually.) Or is that too clever?

But then, as D. West might put it, why should I have to do all the thinking? If I cover every last bit of the argument, what would you have left to say?

FURTHER READING

Jared Diamond -- *Guns, Germs And Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*

Richard Leakey with Roger Frewin -- *The Sixth Extinction: Biodiversity And Its Survival*

Colin Tudge -- *The Day Before Yesterday: Five Million Years Of Human Evolution*

Edmund Wilson -- *The Diversity Of Life*

This is INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER No 1

(Incorporating Socialist Allotment Worker) from:

Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road
South Tottenham
London N15 4JU

PRINTED MATTER

REDUCED RATE

Andre Bernard's *Now All We Need Is A Title: Famous Book Titles And How They Got That Way* is "a work of quick reference and easy bite-size laughs, with no pretensions to serious analysis", according to Christopher Hart, who reviewed it in *The Spectator* for 19 April 1997. His concluding paragraph was as follows:

"The best story of all, perhaps, involves not great literature but a children's picture book. When Simon & Schuster published *Dr Dan The Bandage Man* they decided to include half-a-dozen band-aids with each book as a gimmick. They wired Johnson & Johnson, PLEASE SHIP TWO MILLION BAND-AIDS IMMEDIATELY. The makers promptly wired back, BAND-AIDS ON THEIR WAY. WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU?"

The Copyright Licensing Agency publishes an annual register of works which are excluded from its agreement and for which permission must be obtained in writing before any copies can be made. It even includes a science fiction novel, Alan Dead Foster's *Flinx In Flux* (although one cannot imagine why anyone would want to read the thing in the first place). Other works for which written permission must be obtained include *The Ugly Duckling*, several of Thomas Hardy's novels and Shakespeare's plays, Gray's *Principles Of Human Anatomy*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and *The Domesday Book*.

So sue us, dead guys!

GREAT STATISTICS OF OUR TIME:

Only 14% of Americans have passports; and only 11% have actually been abroad. Another 3% of Americans believe themselves to have been abducted by UFOs, although it's not known if they belong to either of these two categories of passport-holders.
