

# A Global Paradox

## 'No' to the movement of money but not people

Books reviewed by John F. Rohe

In a hard-hitting trilogy of books, with 1,103 cumulative pages, the Sierra Club expresses its disdain for the persistent drift toward a global economy.

Electronic pulses representing massive transfers of monetary wealth now whiz across the planet with the speed of light. Even national borders are no longer speed bumps on the road to economic growth. Computer technology empowers money to scour the planet instantaneously. These three Sierra Club Books artfully probe the underlying objectives and effects of corporate globalization.

In *The Case Against the Global Economy*, editors Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith assemble forty-three separate essays, in a logical format. The essays evaluate the impact of globalization, why globalization has failed us, what engines continue to drive us toward globalization, and how we may once again restore a local economy.

Did you ever want to join scores of notable authors in a roundtable discussion on the effects of technology and corporate globalization? There is no need to leave your home. You will also be accompanied by the compassionate talent and organizational expertise of editor Stephanie Mills in *Turning Away From Technology*. This book

---

**John F. Rohe** an attorney in Petoskey, Michigan, with a long-standing interest in environmental concerns, is the author of *A Bicentennial Malthusian Essay: Conservation, Population and the Indifference to Limits*. Copies may be ordered from the Social Contract Press, 1-800-352-4843.

represents the collective wisdom of great thinkers in our time, with the editorial hand of Stephanie Mills to bring clarity and brevity to each comment.

*The Case Against the Global Economy* and *Turning Away From Technology* include the views of leaders in the conservation movement. In *The Corporate Planet*, Joshua Karliner, exposes greed in the corporate global reach. Mitsubishi, Chevron, the hazardous waste industry, the green-washing public relations industry and others fall within Karliner's scope as he exposes the day-to-day hazards of globalization.

I find seven common arguments against globalization emerging in these three books from the Sierra Club.

**1. Environmental Standards.** As stated by Joshua Karliner at page 82 of *The Corporate Planet* "With freshly opened, burgeoning new markets available, U.S. corporations are now attempting to use the global economy as a wedge to dismantle U.S. environmental standards in the name of jobs and economic competitiveness." Karliner also points out: "...this kind of approach sets up a race to the bottom of the regulatory barrel."

With the speed and efficiency of a computer chip, companies are able to track down the lowest environmental standards instantaneously, while exacting an economic penalty from areas of environmental protection.

**2. Employment Protections.** The weakest environmental protections are not the only links in the chain of national sovereignty stalked by the corporate globalizers. Employment standards, and child labor laws, are also under assault. Nimble corporations gracefully dance around established standards to exploit the most vulnerable workers, wherever they may be found on the face of the earth.

---

### The Case Against the Global Economy

by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith  
San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1996  
549 pages, \$16.00



### The Corporate Planet

by Joshua Karliner  
San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1997  
298 pages, \$16.00

### Turning Away from Technology

by Stephanie Mills  
San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1997  
256 pages, \$18.00

---

3. **Cultural Integrity.** Indigenous cultures become the first casualty in the search for weak standards and vulnerable employees. The unsustainable consumption patterns of industrial nations are transplanted to historic cultures least able to maintain their integrity against the tide of globalization.

4. **Community Fabric.** Localized and sustainable lifestyles woven into a community fabric are systematically dislodged by globalization. Communities of indigenous peoples have established enduring practices to live with the land. Their sustainable lifestyle is endangered by globalization.

5. **Growth Ethic.** "Growth for the sake of growth," in the words of the late Edward Abbey, "is the ideology of a cancer cell." An abiding faith in economic growth is the unexamined conviction in the age of globalization. Practices of a community or nation are dislodged as the corporate growth ethic now rapidly metastasizes on the face of the earth. With free trade treaties on a fast track, even national sovereignty has plummeted in the global community.

6. **Language Losses.** The common bond of language helps ensure cultural integrity. The world's 6,000 languages will soon be reduced by 50%, to 3,000. This becomes yet another casualty of globalization.

7. **Accountability.** A local economy promotes accountability. Where the impact of an irresponsible economic decision is close at hand, the decision makers cannot always escape the voice of concern. Where, however, the decision makers' money is instantaneously whisked across the globe, accountability is compromised. The global economic network establishes only a one-way street. It allows the safe migration of money, but the voice of concern does not enjoy the same swift passage. Any response is effectively silenced by geography. Where might the tenant farmer in a Philippine barrio go to complain of the toxic waste site next door? Wall Street? Not likely. The decision-maker thus enjoys near immunity from the concerns of an afflicted distant community suffering environmental and labor abuse.

While the Sierra Club has taken a well-reasoned and formidable position against globalization, it has not embraced immigration reform. Indeed, there is a remarkable silence on the topic of immigration reform in this trilogy of Sierra Club Books. Yet the intellectual underpinnings of opposition to globalization parallel principles of the immigration reform movement.

---

***"An abiding faith in economic growth is the unexamined conviction in the age of globalization."***

\* \* \*

***"The [far-away corporate] decision-maker enjoys immunity from the concerns of an afflicted distant community suffering environmental and labor abuse."***

---

It seems to this reviewer that each of the seven themes identified above finds a counterpart in the immigration reform movement. Open borders, whether for massive monetary exchange, or for extensive movement of people, are often products of a corporate culture. Economic globalization and open borders serve to undermine national sovereignty and its existing standards of environmental decency and employment dignity. The Sierra Club observes that globalization is brought to us by the same people who brought us urban sprawl and the Love Canal. Casualties in the wake of this so-called progress do not register on their radar screens.

The Sierra Club is conducting a vote on whether to support immigration reform. Its passionate opposition to globalization brings it just one heartbeat away from firmly embracing immigration reform. Opposing the immense global movement of money while upholding the massive migration of people is a global paradox. Hopefully the irony will not be lost on the Sierra Club members.

**TSC**