

## A Note from the Guest Editor

by John F. Rohe

*One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.*

—Aldo Leopold, *Round River*

As the laws of gravity press against the stock market, our financial community serves up healthy assurances of continued economic growth and prosperity. Meanwhile, Lester Brown keeps a finger on the pulse of the planet. He counters with the observation that economic progress has exacted environmental losses along the way.

Narratives of the blessings of economic growth line financial news pages. Brown's bird's-eye view elevates him to another plane. From this perch, a frayed web of life comes into view. He observes that our lives remain perilously embedded in a fragile system.

With a \$500,000 grant from the Rockefeller brothers in 1974, Brown founded the WorldWatch Institute to maintain statistics on the globe's life-supporting systems. He recently formed the Earth Policy Institute (EPI) to formulate new economic policies. As the reality of a finite planet collides with the aspiration for perpetual resource depletion, Brown envisions a radical change in our world view. EPI will likely be on the front lines of this paradigm shift.

The gravity of Brown's determination is gleaned from between the lines. When depressing a fuel pump nozzle, he likely feels implicated in tense geopolitical complexes with weapons of mass destruction poised to defend the depletion of non-renewable natural resources. When he flicks on a light switch, his conscience might confront neurological diseases caused by mercury contamination descending upon lakes and streams from coal-fired power plants. When

---

*John F. Rohe is an attorney in Petoskey, Michigan with a long-standing concern for the environment. He is the author of A Bicentennial Malthusian Essay: Conservation and the Indifference to Limits, as well as Mary Lou & John Tanton: A Journey into American Conservation. Both are available from The Social Contract Press, 1-800-352-4843.*

grilling a steak on a steamy summer afternoon, he possibly becomes entangled with the livestock farmers who are clearing forests, causing groundwater contamination, and contributing to global warming.

This issue of *The Social Contract* features five of Lester Brown's recent writings. He reports on the garbage capital of the world (New York), China's dust bowl, history's greatest investment opportunity in future resources, an optimistic insight into the world wind-generating capacity, and an excerpt from his latest work, *Eco-Economy* — the book that has become the mission statement of the Earth Policy Institute. Each article provides an insight into one of our great challenges, even as it offers a glimpse into one of the most perceptive minds of our times. Brown has granted *The Social Contract* an interview in which his personal history and motivational criteria are explored.

Investment promoters and other obligated optimists operate on the unexamined assumption that a finite planet can accommodate all of our hopes and aspirations. Lester Brown strikes back. The specter of global destruction rises to assert itself against his conscience. Yet he wields but a single weapon: his mighty pen. With the power of the word he tirelessly challenges conventional wisdom.

As readers of the accompanying interview will learn, Brown has now become an advocate for more growth. Yes, more growth! Another pro-growther, but of a different stripe. He is now waging a battle for more growth in renewable energy, growth in recycling, growth in responsible agricultural practices, and growth in concern for the future. Under his definition, our finite globe might in fact have the resilience to accommodate perpetual growth.

Concerned readers will want to bookmark Brown's web site at [www.earth-policy.org](http://www.earth-policy.org) and avail themselves of his frequent "Alerts" which are articles and essays about recent developments in the struggle to balance human welfare with the carrying capacity of planet Earth.

In this quarter's issue, *The Social Contract* tips its hat to the ingenuity, the resourcefulness, the spirit, the determination, and ultimately, the compassion for the future so generously shared by Lester Brown.

JOHN F. ROHE