

Globalization versus The Common Good

Book Review by Ted Wheelwright

The authors say in their acknowledgment that their book is dedicated to “all those who care for the environment and wish to stop its current vandalization in the name of ‘progress’ and corporate profit.” Sauer-Thompson is at Flinders University and Smith at the University of Adelaide. They also say they do not owe thanks to many people in the academy, where their project met with indifference and hostility.

It is an important book which accurately focuses on the contemporary Australian mood of “insecurity, anxiety, and anger” — insecurity because of the reduced standard of living for many; anxiety because our cultural traditions do not seem to help deal with the crisis; and anger because the market is tearing our social fabric apart, and “we are losing our sense of belonging and identity.”

There are six long chapters which could have been shortened and improved by good editing, but each contains crucial material and arguments. The first focuses on the failure of the opening up of Australia to the global market to bring benefits to all. It notes that the result has been the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, less control over our lives, more dependence on the market which cares nothing for our quality of life, and high unemployment, especially for the young. The opening-out to the global market over the last five years is seen as working in favor of “the financial, banking and business executives and élite in the state administrative bureaucracy” (p.5).

Consequently, corporate politics has perverted those forms of politics which were meant to connect citizens to government. Citizens have become

disenfranchised and corporations enfranchised, as global capital seeks open borders, minimal government, and a high-tech version of 19th century working conditions” (p.8). The process of opening to the global market is being managed by a centralized state on behalf of big capital.

The authors consider that most Australian workers thought they belonged to the middle class, or aspired to join it. However, globalization, deregulation, privatization and computerization are putting an end to these aspirations, and what has resulted is the loss of sovereignty and a national way of life. This is also linked to impending ecological catastrophe; a central issue of our time is ecologically sustainable development.

This issue is pursued in the third chapter which develops Herman Daly’s thesis that globalization fatally wounds the ability of a community to carry out policies for the common good, especially those relating to the environment. The market destroys community, hence the conclusion that “the market should be subordinated to the ecological good life of the citizens of the nation state ... the question is: who is to be master

— citizens or business?” (p.132)

The fourth chapter argues that the power of the state is still necessary for citizens to be able to control the market to ensure national ecologically sustainable development. “It gives us a possibility to build a way of life that counteracts the traditional economic nationalist one of an industrial nation with high levels of immigration, large domestic market, domination of nature, exploitation of human beings, statism, fantasies of an inexhaustible cornucopia of technological improvements, and dependency on exports for our well-being” (p.175).

The fifth chapter engages the debate on nationalism, arguing that reason and tradition are not absolute opposites: “reason is encultured within

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E. L. “Ted” Wheelwright, Ph. D., is Professor of Economics Emeritus at the University of Sydney.

traditions and presupposes prejudice and ideologies" (p.186). The nation state is seen as a historical tradition, Australian nationalism as an anti-colonial discourse, and national culture as an expansion of political identity, which is being destroyed by globalization, deregulation, and privatization.

The final chapter accepts the arguments of Nietzsche that the crisis of modernity is the loss of the commonly shared culture with which citizens can deal with the world created by capitalism. Liberalism has collapsed into an apology for the market which commodifies everything, including education.

The Enlightenment turned technological has become an ideological screen for an increasingly authoritarian business democracy in which we have basically one political party with two right wings... Economic science is being used to maintain growth and prove there is no acceptable alternative to the existing form of society beyond their reforms of structural efficiency, public sector downsizing, privatization and deregulation of the market to integrate and subordinate the state to the international economy (p.247).

The book is a welcome contribution by Australia to the world's growing body of literature critical of globalization, but oddly makes no reference to the first such contribution: *Australia: A Client State* by myself and Greg Crough (Melbourne: Penguin, 1982), or to the Transnational Corporations Research Project which we founded in 1975 at the University of Sydney, producing many books and articles on the subject. Nevertheless, this work is a *tour de force* and should be read by all those concerned about what is happening to Australia.

It is also of interest to readers elsewhere, especially those in countries which have received large amounts of foreign capital and experienced high levels of immigration. It shows clearly that transnational capitalism is a *cause* of many of the world's problems, not a solution to them. **TSC**

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