

## Professional Superhero

An interview with Alanna Hartzok, United Nations NGO Representative for the International Union for Land Value Taxation, by Adam Monroe as published in IN Magazine, Vol. xiv, No. 1, 1997.

INSIDER - Who are the United Nations NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and what influence do they have?

Alanna - UN/NGOs are concerned with human rights, the environment, disarmament, spiritual development, food, health, and a great array of humanitarian not-for-profit activities. Some universities have also established their linkage to the UN in this way.

The influence and organizing capacity of UN/NGOs has been growing. The concerns of UN/NGOs are usually global and transcend the interests of any particular nation state. So in some ways they are freer to work for the good of the world's people as a whole than are official UN nation state representatives, who are beholden to the interests of their particular country. If the world is going to work for any of us, it has to work for all of us.

I was fortunate to attend Habitat II in Turkey, the most recent UN sponsored global conference. (It was) such a natural high to be with people from around the globe who were deeply concerned about how to create a better world. For my NGO, I organized and conducted six seminars at Habitat II on this theme: "The Earth is the Birthright of All People." John McConnell, Equinox Earth Day founder, spoke at one of these and presented his Earth Trustee ideas - that the earth's land and resources are humanity's common heritage and a percentage of the value of earth resources should be distributed as dividends to people rather than having the earth used for private profit through land speculation.

INSIDER - Tell us more about the organization you represent.

Alanna - I represent the International Union for Land Value Taxation. We work to establish democratic rights to the earth. The earth is the birthright of all people, or certainly should be. The site or market value, called ground rent, of land and re-

sources should be collected for the benefit of the community as a whole rather than funneled as private profit into the hands of a few. This is the proper source of funding for community needs.

Sixteen cities in the state of Pennsylvania are now practicing a local tax reform based on this approach and it has revitalized the local economies. For instance, Mayor Steven Reed of Harrisburg says this has been the key policy that helped his city go from being the second most distressed municipality in the US to being one of the highest quality of life cities on several indicators. Thousands of boarded-up buildings were fixed up, good jobs were created, and the crime and fire rates dropped significantly. The newly formed Greater Municipality of Cape Town in South Africa plans to go entirely to this system during the next few years. We need to keep an eye on Brazil as well because land rights activists there have applied so much pressure that the government has promised to put in place a land value taxation system there, too.

Some of these common heritage resource funds could also be distributed as "earthshare dividends" directly to individuals. They do this in Alaska where citizens receive dividend checks of \$1000 a year for state oil resources. Public finance policies based on this approach are a practical method of achieving democratic rights to the earth. Meanwhile, taxes on workers need to be relieved so that people can have economic freedom.

Understanding the tax system is extremely important so that we can use our political democratic rights to vote for economic democracy. Our democracy is in danger because of the maldistribution of wealth problem due to the concentration of wealth into the hands of the few. Democracy has been political but not economic. America brought over the system that damaged old Europe and once the frontier closed, it began wreaking the same problems here.

The problem is we treat land and natural resources as commodities for private profit and speculation. Relatively few now quite literally own and control the earth. The words of Thomas Paine that were not heeded are these: "Men did not make the earth... it is the value of the improvement only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property... Every proprietor owes to the community a ground rent for the land which he holds."

Thomas Jefferson said: "The earth is given as a common stock... Wherever in any country there are idle lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right."

People should share equal ownership of and access to land. The end-point of democratic economics will be the real beginning of human liberation.

INSIDER - Should the United Nations be reorganized to give more influence to other member nations than the few who sit on the Security Council?

Alanna - You have certainly done your homework. There are many UN reform proposals being put forth at this time. Currently very tiny nations as well as giant superpowers have equal representation at the UN, although the Security Council members have the largest degree of power. The World Federalist Association wants a world government that will supercede national interests as such, but because they have not thought through the kinds of economic issues we have been discussing, that would be dangerous at this time. Other efforts include the Constitution for the Federation of Earth, which would scrap the UN and nation state system entirely.

INSIDER - What is the relationship between the UN and the other "world government" taking shape around the WTO (World Trade Organization)?

Alanna - There are indications that at this time the UN and the corporate elite that have major control of the WTO are in bed together. But then again, we are all in this together, are we not?

Many people sincerely believe that current capitalist arrangements really will solve civilization's problems. With the demise of Marxism and state bureaucratic socialism, many are at a loss for a viable alternative. It may be more a problem of bad ideas rather than bad people. Each of us has to consider if we are part of the problem or part of the solution.

But we have only to look at the growing pockets of third world conditions growing under our noses within first world nations to see that the present type of capitalist system is not working.

INSIDER - Will the UN endorse the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment)?

Alanna - As things now stand I would say that the MA would likely be supported by the powers in control. But the MAI would override local and national democracies to such a degree that surely the people will not tolerate it. MAI is one of the best things the elites could be promoting right now in order to provoke popular resistance to elite control. As Princess Leia said in Star Wars regarding the designs of the Evil Emperor, "The tighter he closes his fists the faster star systems fly between his fingers."

The spirit of Gandhi's *satyagraha* or truth force is the correct approach. Gandhi strongly criticized and worked against unjust institutions but always respected people as individuals.

Be proactive in creating the new rather than simply reactive in attacking the old. Let the old fall of its own dead weight.

There is, of course, an out-of-control system of power that is well documented in David Korten's book, *When Corporations Rule the World*, a highly recommended read, and in the writings of Vandana Shiva on "biopiracy." The result, as my associate Trent Schroyer, a TOES (The Other Economic Summit) organizer puts it, (the corporate culture) "eats out the substance of human community by reducing us to economic individuals or information processing cyborgs of the system."

Nevertheless, I am somewhat concerned about the anti-corporation emphasis to be found in many of the progressive movements. There ARE hardworking business people and political leaders who really are trying to make things work better for everyone.

I think what's really happening is that under the guise of neoliberal economics, the power elite are trying to take over the world, while those with greater vision and compassion are trying to transform it to a higher dimension.

Insider - So, what do you do when you are not saving the world?

Alanna - I live in a modest home on a few acres of land with my two teenagers in rural Pennsylvania. This year our homestead's organic garden is filled with peas, beans, beets, radishes, tomatoes, potatoes, corn, chard, carrots, okra, onions, peppers, cucumbers, and lovely statice and strawflowers. Our pygmy goat and the cats are playful and the two horses are a luxury. Sometimes I celebrate life by playing guitar or piano and singing.

Insider - What is your best advice for America's next generation?

Alanna - Be kind to yourself, and your family members, friends and neighbors. Without getting too fanatical, be conscious about the food you eat and the things you use in terms of their impact on your body, mind, and spirit, the earth and other people and life forms of the earth.

Work cooperatively with each other to establish right livelihoods so that your creative abilities are freed to fulfill the greater purpose of your lives. Link hearts and hands in your own communities and across the globe to transform the system.

\* Note: Since the time of this interview, the two old horses died and were replaced by three sheep. The sheep kept crawling under the fence and running around the neighborhood, so they were replaced by another two beloved horses that are residing on the "Aradhana" eco-homestead as of year 2007.