

PAY FOR WHAT YOU TAKE

[The following are highlights of the speech by Alanna Hartzok, Green Party candidate for the US Congress, that was given in April 2001 to ALTER members at the Henry George Foundation in London.]

Greetings from the United States of Anxiety - the land of working longer for less, where 40% of the people suffer from too little sleep, too much stress and an epidemic of depression; where one in four children live in poverty, 40 million people have no health insurance and a record number, nearly two million, are in jail; where senior citizens are gouged with exorbitant costs for medicine by giant pharmaceutical companies who push for profit to the limits of what a monopolized market can bare; where children shoot children and killer dogs are cool.

I believe that many of these symptoms of a society in crisis - of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual malaise - stem from an unconscious, inequitable, unjust and deeply flawed economic system. Here are a few facts regarding the wealth gap in the USA: in 1976 the wealthiest 1% of the population had 19% of household wealth and the bottom 90% had 51%. Today the wealthiest 1% of the people of the United States of Anxiety has more wealth than the bottom 90% and that gap is growing day after day.

We have to dive deep in our quest for the underlying causes of the growing gap between the very few and the rest of us on this planet. When we do, we discover that a very few of us now own and control the source not only of human material wealth but of all life - the earth itself.

How we hold the earth is how we hold each other. As we harm, tear or take the earth by force, so do we harm, tear and take by force each other. As we damage and dishonour this earth, to the same degree we damage and dishonour each other. As we buy and sell and hope to profit from this earth, her land and natural resources, so do we buy and sell and hope to profit from each other. In treating the earth as a market commodity so we become, as individuals, mere items in a dehumanizing human market; each of us a commodity for sale with a price tag - hopefully a high price tag - but mostly at a bargain basement cut-rate. Thus we become consumers of each other more so than friends and family of each other. Defined as consumers in an all-consuming endeavour to consume, we are consumed and all is lost.

So here we are, in a world where less than 300 billionaires amongst us have cornered the earth-human commodities market and so plunder a planet and its people, plants, and animals for personal profit. Those of us in this room, and in our living rooms and our rooms of Parliament and our rooms of Congress are playing and paying and maybe even praying by the rules of this game of profit and plunder. In this world now which we have created, during the most vital years of our lives, we work very hard for several months each year to pollute our earth and poison ourselves and enslave one another. This is a strong and outrageous statement which needs to be supported

One piece of evidence, from the United States of Anxiety, is that more than \$50 billion of our tax money is given as

subsidies to giant corporations which pollute our land and destroy our natural resources to boost their bottom line and fortify their private profits. During the past century we have been freeing from taxation those who take the earth by force and thus we would seem to condone their plunder. We the vast majority of the people now carry the burden of the tax on our backs and the backs of our husbands and wives, family and friends. We must work ever harder and sleep less and less with little or no savings or time to savour the sweetness of human relations that makes life worth living. This is the world we have created.

Just as an individual can transcend from a repressed and depressed psychological state, and move from self-hatred to self-respect, so can a whole society and yes, even the people of an entire planet ascend to a state of deep caring for each other and profound respect for the world. Indeed, nothing less will do. We can and we must now build a safe, sane and secure global society. An increasing number of us now perceives that the full flowering of human respect and caring can be furthered by a fundamental shift in, of all things, taxation policy.

There are a couple of keys to understanding the importance of this crucial shift in the way we finance the public affairs of our planet. One is the need to add a new dimension to the democratic mandate itself. Democracy must be constituted on the equal right of each person to the land and resources of the earth. A primary role of government must be to promote, protect, defend and secure the equal right of all to the planet itself. We the people who govern ourselves under democratic covenants must now secure this right. We deserve the earth by right of our existence! We deserve the Earth by right of birth! YES-we declare the right to the planet as a human right!

Paradoxically, only by securing equal rights to common heritage property can government continue to protect and defend the rights of the individual to private property in what is rightfully private property, which is that property produced by the individual through the labour of that individual. The rate of the concentration of wealth is growing so rapidly that soon there will be very little private property for government to defend. Unless we have a fundamental shift, our governments will defend the private property of the few over and above the very right to exist of the many. Even now, the vast majority of us in the so-called developed, democratic world are weighed under by consumer debt or mortgage payments.

We must now shift taxation OFF human-made private property and human labor in goods and services and ONTO the use of the gifts of nature. Simply stated, taxation must be based upon the principle of "Pay for what you take, not what you make."

Increasing numbers of us are awakening to our role in this transformation. Everyone is welcome to join us. We may not be venture capitalists, but we ARE humans engaged in the adventure of healing the people and the planet.

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