

Subvert the Dominant Paradigm!

by Richard Evanoff

I first met Anja Light, the activist who took a road show around Japan to educate people about the connection between Japanese corporations and the destruction of Malaysian rainforests, a few years ago at an arts festival. She was selling bumperstickers with the slogan "SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM" written on them. I liked the bumpersticker as much as I did the postcard that one of my colleagues once sent me: "IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER WE CAN TOTALLY DISRUPT THE SYSTEM." So I promptly bought a few of the bumperstickers and, not having a car, began pasting them upside down (in truly subversive fashion) at some of the places where I hang out.

O.K., now I'd like to tell you about a book I recently finished reading which manages to completely fulfill the aspirations of the bumpersticker: *Steady-State Economics* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1991) by Herman E. Daly, who surprisingly and almost unbelievably is a former economist with the World Bank. [See the interview with Daly in the September 1994 issue of JEM.] Even if you don't like economics — especially if you don't like economics — here's a book that will lay down in clear, easy-to-understand language exactly how wrong-headed modern economics has become and how much it (and the planet) could benefit from a total paradigm shift. Daly's basic contention is that conventional economics ignores the ecological limits to growth and hasn't really faced up to the problems of resource depletion and the ability of the biosphere to absorb wastes. In place of a high-growth economy Daly proposes a steady-state economy (SSE), which allows for qualitative but not quantitative improvement and is ecologically sustainable.

To achieve a SSE Daly has three recommendations: (1) Limit population in both the first and third world by issuing exchangeable

birth quotas. Every woman (or couple) would have the right to reproduce 2.1 offspring, the current replacement level. The rights could be sold in increments of 0.1 to allow couples to have more or fewer children as they choose. (2) Limit the production of resource-depleting goods by having a depletion quota or depletion tax. Taxing resources makes more sense than taxing pollution after the fact (the current favored remedy), and would allow us to move more quickly from an economy based on nonrenewable resources to one based on renewable resources. (3) Redistribute wealth by setting both minimum and maximum income levels. A minimum income would provide better social insurance than welfare and allow money to "trickle up" through the economy (the opposite of the infamous "trickle down" theory). A maximum income would be a disincentive to luxurious consumption beyond reasonable necessity. The upshot of Daly's proposals is a subversion of the dominant economic paradigm. If conventional economics is defined as "unlimited desires competing for scarce resources," we might define steady-state economics as "limited desires sharing abundant resources." There is enough, as Gandhi once said, for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed.

To illustrate what an easy but enlightened read the book is, I'll devote the rest of the column, in *Whole Earth Review* fashion, to letting Daly speak for himself. To fully appreciate the soundness of his arguments, have a good look at the book itself. I hope these excerpts, which also reveal a bit of Daly's ironic humor and vivid imagery, will stimulate interest:

• *What Is Growthmania?* Economic growth is currently the major goal of both capitalist and socialist countries and, of course, of Third World countries... Economic growth is held to be the cure for poverty, unemployment, debt repayment, inflation, balance of payment deficits, pollution, depletion, the population explosion, crime, divorce, and drug addiction. In short, economic growth is both the panacea and the *summum bonum*. This is growthmania. When we add to GNP the costs of defending ourselves against the unwanted consequences of growth and happily count that as further growth, we then have hyper-growthmania. When we deplete geological capital and ecological life-support systems and count that depletion as net current income, then we arrive at our present state of terminal hyper-growthmania. [p. 183]

• *What Is a Steady-State Economy?* The concept of the SSE can be clarified by analogy to a steady-state library, an idea that has attracted the attention of some librarians who realize that their stock of books cannot continue to grow exponentially. A steady-state library would have a constant stock of books. Whenever a new book is added, an old one must be gotten rid of. The rule would be to add a book only if it were qualitatively better than some other book whose place it would

take. The steady-state library would continue to improve qualitatively, but its quantitative physical scale would remain constant. Likewise for a steady-state economy. The end of physical accretion is not the end of progress. It is more a precondition for future progress, in the sense of qualitative improvement. [p. 182]

• *Crocodile Tears from Latter-Day Marie Antoinettes.* Economists and businessmen with no previous record of concern for the poor have now begun to attack steady-state advocates as upper-class social climbers, who, having gotten theirs, now want to kick the ladder down behind them and leave the poor forever on the ground floor. There may be such people, and certainly they should be condemned. But most advocates of the steady state accept and proclaim the absolute necessity of limits to inequality in the distribution of both wealth and income. Indeed, many people who have long favored less inequality in the distribution of wealth on ethical and political grounds have reached the same conclusion on ecological grounds. It is the orthodox growthmen who want to avoid the distribution issue. As Wallich so bluntly put it in defending growth, "Growth is a substitute for equality of income. So long as there is growth there is hope, and that makes large income differentials tolerable" [Henry C. Wallich, "Zero Growth," *Newsweek*, January 24, 1972, p. 62]. We are addicted to growth because we are addicted to large inequalities in income and wealth. What about the poor? Let them eat growth! Better yet, let them feed on the hope of eating growth in the future! [p. 103]

• *Zero Growth and the Great Depression.* One of the more disingenuous arguments against the SSE was put forward by the editors of *Fortune*, who stated that "the country has just gone through a real life tryout of zero growth" ["Well, How Do You Like Zero Growth?," *Fortune*, Nov. 1976, p. 116]. This was the period 1973-1975, a period remembered "not as an episode of zero growth but as the worst recession since the 1930s." *Fortune* identifies a SSE with a failed growth economy. A condition of nongrowth can come about in two ways: as the failure of a growth economy, or as the success of a steady-state economy. The two cases are as different as night and day. No one denies that the failure of a growth economy to grow brings unemployment and suffering. It is precisely to avoid the suffering of a failed growth economy (we know growth cannot continue) that we advocate a SSE. The fact that an airplane falls to the ground if it tries to remain stationary in the air simply reflects the fact that airplanes are designed for forward motion. It certainly does not imply that a helicopter cannot remain stationary. A growth economy and a SSE are as different as an airplane and a helicopter. Growthmania

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reigns supreme when even the failures of a growth economy become arguments in its defense! [p. 126]

• *Energy and the Growth Debate*. Ask a nuclear engineer why we can't eventually get along using mainly solar energy and adapt our technology and life styles to its benign requirements of decentralization and low-intensity use, and he will tell you that that presents insurmountable problems. Even though it is done by all other species, including those with no central nervous system and hence no brain at all, living on solar-energy income is just too big a challenge for our technologists. But ask him how he intends to solve any of the truly impossible problems [of nuclear energy], and he will tell you that science can do anything! [p. 137]

• *Preface to the Second Edition*. Surely fourteen to twenty years is enough time for serious people to search for an error, to weigh the evidence, and to come to a conclusion, especially when world events every day provide further painful evidence of ecological limits on economic growth. But during that period, to my knowledge, not one economics journal bothered to have *Steady-State Economics* reviewed. [p. xi]

The Return of Japan's High Level Waste

POSTCARD CAMPAIGN TO COUNTRIES EN ROUTE

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The high-level waste (HLW) resulting from reprocessing of Japanese spent fuel in Europe is supposed to be returned to Japan in solid, vitrified, form on board a purpose-built cargo ship. Three to four thousand canisters in total are expected to be returned to Japan from France and the UK in several tens of shipments starting in February, 1995, with each shipment said to be carrying 28 canisters. International Japanese electric company documents state that the route will be the Panama Canal.

The toxicity of HLW is such that even the contents of a single canister, if released to the human environment, could cause cancer in tens of thousands of people. A cargo ship

fully loaded with HLW canisters will carry radioactivity in quantities far exceeding the total amount released in the 1986 Chernobyl accident, thus living up to the name of "floating Chernobyl."

At the time of the *Akatsukimaru* plutonium shipment, Japanese citizens sent postcards directly to the governments and embassies of the various countries en route, and were successful in raising voices of strong opposition from abroad against the Japanese government's policy. This postcard campaign focuses on Caribbean countries, Panama, and South American countries surrounding Panama.

In related news, Japanese citizens on Monday, December 5 met at length with the Director of the Science and Technology Agency, Ms. Tanaka Makiko, and submitted dozens of boxes containing 803,466 signatures on petitions seeking a moratorium on Monju.

PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN OUR POSTCARD CAMPAIGN!

For further information, or a 30-postcard packet, please contact the Plutonium Action Network NOW!