

Out of the Past:
a Devisive Democracy

Into the Future:
a Citizens' Alternative

COMMUNITARIAN MANIFESTO
BY NEW IRELAND GROUP

COMMUNITARIAN MANIFESTO

**HIGH TECHNOLOGY ECONOMY AND
THE POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**

by

John Robb

As prepared for presentation at the New Ireland Group Meeting in
The Mansion House, Dublin, Sat. 20th. October 2001

(Second Edition: Revised draft)

With additions added to the INTRODUCTION under the heading, 'Background'
and
The inclusion of a TENTH 'POINTER' to the Provisional Community Charter

EVOLVING PAMPHLET:

Further Amendments, suggestions, criticisms, additions etc. welcome!

INTRODUCTION

Whether Ireland remains partitioned or the Irish people come to realise that there will be no enduring peace and reconciliation as long as partition remains there will be a need to claim back democracy for the ordinary people and thus to re-allocate power and responsibility with accountability to the workplace and to the local community whether it be in the urban estate or rural neighbourhood. This pamphlet has been written to assist the promotion of a peoples' orientated democracy which should be as relevant in a partitioned island as it would be in a New inclusive All-Ireland society.

INDEX

Humanity and Purpose in a just society	page 3
Demand for democratisation of Institutions and of Local \Communities	
-Nationalist enthusiasm: Loyalist/Unionist reticence	page 3-4
'Catch Up' -The current Loyalist experience	page 5
Institutional Democracy: Smaller Hospitals, the example	page 6

BACKGROUND

PARTICIPATION AND POWER

1960s, 1970s and now!	page 7-8
------------------------------	----------

CENTRALISM

Super-Specialist Paradox	page 9
The Temptation: Extra-Parliamentary Action	page 10
Fire Questions: Ecology, the priority. New Ireland - a Green Ireland	page 10-11
Centralism - The main disease of our time	page 11
Change: Its Rate and its Degree	page 15-16
New Technology: a means of decentralisation	page 17

ECONOMY AND THE ECO-CHALLENGE

Page 17+

PROPOSAL FOR ACTION

NIGs Ten Point COMMUNITY CHARTER

Page 25-35

Co-operative Councils	Page 16
Community Guilds	Page 26
Community forum	Page 27
Community Workshops	Page 30
Citizens' Advice Bureaux	Page 30
Community Associations	Page 31
Simplified Community Tax System	Page 32
National Social Service	Page 34
Community Radio	Page 35
Networking	Page 35

This manifesto is the result of discussion, debate and working experience gleaned over many years. The work and writings of E.F. Schumacher¹ in conjunction with reading regularly about the new thinking and fresh awareness to be found in the monthly publication of RESURGENCE² is acknowledged as having made a significant contribution to the debates, discussions and actions which have been involved in its formulation.

Humanity and Purpose in a Just Society.

It is nineteen years (1983) since the New Ireland Group offered a 40,000-word submission to the New Ireland Forum. Section 3 of that submission dealt with the high-technology economy in a post-industrial society; in it we made some recommendations for an appropriate response to the rapidly changing world of work, employment and social space in the new era which was opening before us.

By way of introduction, we quoted from the pamphlet, 'New Ireland: Sell-Out or Opportunity?', published in 1972³:-

"The humanity of many is strangled by the pressures needed to maintain the momentum of 'success', sales and status at the altar of consumption and pollution. North and South, separate or in union, may not at *present* have great resources in terms of standards set by Western acquisitiveness and excessive consumption. We cannot promise nor be promised a higher standard of living, but we could pass to posterity, a just society where the resources are shared and where community life achieves a new significance and human beings a new richness of purpose."

It is 30 years since that statement was written yet it still seems to pose a relevant challenge to those who feel that the people of Ireland should undertake a fundamental re-appraisal of a way of life in which a greedy materialism has become so central to those who prosper while others suffer the frustration and social anger of feeling excluded from what is on offer.

^{1a} Small is Beautiful (a study of economics as if people mattered): E.F. Schumacher. Blond & Briggs Ltd. (1973: 1974)

^{1b} 'This I Believe' and other essays: E.F.Schumacher: Green Books Ltd. ‡ A Resurgence Book (1997)

² Resurgence, Ford House, Hartland, Bideford, Devon, EX39 6EE Tel. 01237 441293

³ New Ireland: Sell Out or Opportunity: Irish News: J.D.A. Robb, p44 (1972)

Background in support of the Manifesto:

The upsurge in demand for Civil Rights here in Northern Ireland seemed to follow on from the activity of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.A. in the 1960s and the student uprising in France in 1968. There was intense interest in the democratisation of institutions and communities. This was particularly marked among a large section of the student body but it also took root among radicals and activists who wished to challenge the status quo and who felt that the right moment had come to do so.

Reluctant Unionists:

Because of the legacy of sectarian history, many members of the Unionist community perceived what was in effect a radical social movement as a threat to the constitutional status quo. Not surprisingly, therefore, changes being demanded were much more sympathetically taken up in predominantly 'nationalist/republican' communities than in those in which unionists dominated. Ideas for local community democratisation, local community empowerment and even Credit Union remained suspect for a very long time in Unionist quarters while nationalists and republicans soared ahead. On the one side, people who felt that they had been labelled 'second class' engaged in struggle while on the other, people who had been dogged by a 'dependency culture' where class consciousness was rife and traditional iconography taken for granted, were hesitant if not downright resistant to any rocking of the boat.

Early mobilization and 'Nationalist' enthusiasm:

By the early seventies a Greater West Belfast Community Association had been convened and it did its best to politicise people at local community level on both sides of the sectarian divide. In the Irish Republic, the Community Government Movement tried hard to raise awareness around the potential of people to effect change which could alter reality for the better where they lived as well as where they worked. Derry probably had the most dynamic development in this regard through the work and leadership of Paddy Doherty. He was born in the Bogside and had become concerned about states of apathy and despondency among young people.

Inspired by what had taken place in the U.S.A. and by rising awareness created by the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland he embarked upon extensive plans for human development in conjunction with other far seeing persons such as Professor Ivor Browne, Paddy Walley and Tom Hardiman who, along with a number of others, provided encouragement, experience and ideas and so it was that the North West Foundation for Human Development was founded. Its first achievement was the establishment of the Derry Community Workshop in which were developed ideas for creative work and enlightened democratic management. Success in its evolving philosophy and policy as well as in function led to the creation of the Derry Inner City Trust which has had such a positive effect on the re-building of the old city centre and also upon the raising of confidence and self esteem among the young people who were empowered by the experience of working in and for it.

¹ New Ireland, Sell-Out or Opportunity?: J.D.A. Robb p42

After a period Paddy Doherty was invited to come to Ballymoney, in the first instance for exchange with the then principal of the local state secondary school. At that time the school workshop had established quite a reputation for itself as a result of designing and constructing in its workshop a complete set of instruments for the school orchestra and, for a while, became widely known for this achievement.

Later on, Paddy Doherty returned to Ballymoney to spend an evening with a group of local middle class entrepreneurs and professionals. In arranging this opportunity it was hoped that ideas and successful actions gleaned from the 'Derry' experience might fire a desire to radicalise social and work-place enterprise locally; instead the visit had negative effect. Those present seemed to view Paddy Doherty's 'Derry' experiment as unsettling if not threatening. Ideas for the activation of a desire let alone a demand for a peoples' development through democratic decision-making in the workplace and in the local community were then too far ahead of the times in many localities in Northern Ireland.

Catch Up: more recent Loyalist experience:

Thankfully, attitudes are changing and opposition mellowing; nevertheless, much energy in Loyalist communities is at present absorbed in the business of 'catch-up'. Even though this process has recently made much progress it has also made people realise just how much hard and persistent work will now be required if self-confidence and self-esteem are to develop to the point where 'change' is more likely to be perceived as a challenge rather than a threat.

For some more than others there is much lee-way to make up. In this regard, and in the recent 5-6 years in Ballymoney, two very dynamic community associations have been operating. Just as we have been inspired by others working in the field so too would we hope, in our turn, to provide encouragement to individuals and communities struggling to get off the ground in the provision of opportunity for individual and collective community development. *The climate has changed quite dramatically since the time when mention of community politics, community development and Credit Union was not seen to be acceptable or necessary in communities with a predominately loyalist membership.*

In addition to the above observations, experience as a consultant surgeon working 'against the medical institutional grain' in the small Route hospital gave further insight into the negative effects on local community life of the combination of the forces of bureaucratic centralism, institutional imperialism and the remote and mysterious operations of entrepreneurial capitalism⁴.

⁴ See pamphlet: Democratic Accountability in a District Health Service: Coleraine Printers: (Sept. 1992) p5.

Example: Smaller Hospitals:

The medical professionals working in the smaller Acute Hospitals of Northern Ireland came together briefly in the 'seventies'. Regrettably, individual interests and differing professional philosophies in relation to the overall problem differed and there wasn't a sufficiently coherent and convergent thrust to save Local Acute Hospitals from the guillotine to come⁴ It was difficult to detect enthusiasm for a collective onslaught on the powerful professional vested interests which were loaded against them.⁵

At that time, there was little support among consultant members of the medical profession in the smaller hospitals to join forces *as equals* with local trade unions, local activists and perhaps more significantly with *all of the other* personnel working in their respective hospitals. Nevertheless, some of us believed that sufficient power could only be activated through mobilising such collective action regardless of whether a member of hospital personnel worked with a shovel or with a scalpel. Alas, it was too early to find whole-hearted support for such a viewpoint, the more is the pity!!

Hopefully, this publication written under the auspices of the New Ireland Group, may help to stimulate further opportunity for more people to realise their potential and in the process to learn the value of working constructively and openly with others for the benefit of the local community as a whole.

Participation and Power:

This pamphlet has been prepared to promote discussion concerning the democratic right of the citizen to participate in any decision-making process which affects her or him. It was also prepared to indicate that participation on its own is insufficient to deal with the increasing democratic deficit being experienced by people all over the world and this, ironically, at a time when greater opportunities for education are planned which should enable more people to think for themselves.

Participation without the power to ensure that such participation is an effective means of changing citizen reality for the better wherever s/he lives or works may merely act as a sop thrown at frustration. Meaningful economic and political power to activate change must replace lip service so easily offered to paint some lofty democratic ideal without serious intent to enable the economic and political action needed to prevent the social frustration and anger which may lead to violence.

The pamphlet suggests a redistribution of economic power with much more emphasis on democratic accountability in all aspects of decision-making. It proposes a new balance between power held at 'the centre', and that *taken back* by the region, the local community and the individual citizen. In this respect the manifesto could provide a fresh challenge to the Trade Union Movement to push for much more sophisticated work-place democracy and at the same time to encourage individual and collective community democracy.

⁴ Democratic Accountability in a District Health Service: 'Causeway to a New Route': Collective response, p4: Pamphlet, New Ireland Group: Coleraine Printers (1992).

^{5a} Submission to the Hayes Enquiry into the provision of Acute Medical Services: Luke warm populists: p11: John Robb (2001)

^{5b} ROUTED: Paper published on behalf of Route Hospital, Ballymoney (1992)

'PARTICIPATION' AND POWER

1960's

Inspired, no doubt, by the Civil Rights Movement of the USA in the early 1960s, the students of Europe took to the streets in 1968. **'Participation'** became the catch-cry, so trenchantly audible that many people perceived it to be a war-cry as well! It was good to be alive in 1968. Authoritarianism was as relentlessly challenged as it had been, for so long, autocratically imposed. Accessibility was demanded; accountability was of the essence.

By the end of the 1960s, in spite of or perhaps because of being exposed to more sophisticated education than ever before, European youth had felt itself caged in by controls and structures which seemed to stultify individual and collective community development and it rebelled. In consequence of their agitation, professors suddenly found themselves sitting uneasily alongside long-haired student representatives on university councils and university senates while company directors struggled to come to terms with board room participation by open-shirted representatives from the factory floor. *Even so, the late 1960s was not the watershed for which so many people were yearning and which so many others feared.*

1970s

By the middle 1970's, anti-establishment radicals had come to realise that 'participation' without the **power** to ensure its effectiveness was little more than a sop thrown at frustration. The professors in the universities, the members of the board of directors and senior civil servants grasped this too; they began to relax as they observed the radical movement running out of steam, its objective of **meaningful** participation unrealisable without the power to make such possible. Retrenchment set in. Thatcher came in.

More than three decades on, however, neither the powers that be nor society in general are in any position to be sanguine about the stability of the status quo.

Powerlessness associated with comfort feeds an accommodating apathy and this, in the more affluent sections of western society, is indeed the prevailing state of affairs. On the other hand, powerlessness allied to loss of comfort and no prospect of change for the better feeds anger and anger breeds violence. The alienation of an increasing number of people and communities who feel on the margins of the society to which they belong is yet again swinging that fickle pendulum from apathy towards anger.

In the west, a new under-class cries out in frustration for more than food. Its members look for a new dignity; it should surprise no one that some of them begin to lash out, distraught for means of self-affirmation. It is not enough just to exist; those who feel marginalised have also a need for affirmation - to state that they too are here and to show that their energies demand space as they await some new direction which will take them

out of the dark margins of ungrassed high-rise tenement estates or other black patches of social disadvantage.

Many of those who are not in the underclass fear that loss of earning opportunity will land them into it. In their case, the powerlessness of fear creates a neurosis of silence.

In spite of the oceans of goodwill which are there to be tapped and in spite of much good work which is in hand, the core problems will remain unless the issues of power, social space and personal development are addressed with more courage and imagination than at present. It is not an over-simplification to suggest that the firing of questions in a campaign to find answers to the problems which beset us - fired fearlessly at one's own community - especially when directed at those with a vested interest in preserving the status quo - may well require more courage than the firing of bullets into someone else's community!

Bureaucratic centralism and institutional imperialism operating in conjunction with the remote and mysterious forces of international capitalism have undermined that accountability which is owed to the citizen in community. 'Remoteness' dictates that accessibility to those who make decisions which affect us ensures that many of us feel we are denied the means of engaging such decision makers.

CENTRALISM

Introduction:

Systems of centralisation have reached a point where vested interest spends much time, energy and money in kindling demand for things which are not only unessential luxuries but also unacceptable in terms of consumption, pollution and poverty.

For the central, the big and the powerful, it is expedient to diminish the peripheral, the small and the powerless. It is more profitable to create need, however artificial and poisonous, than to identify from the poor and the powerless people themselves what *they* feel they need and to discuss and debate the implications of providing it *with* them.

In the process of its development, 'western' centralism, sustained by western consumer capitalism, has produced a burgeoning underclass in the so-called developed world and is associated elsewhere with vast areas of deprivation, destitution and starvation. The gap between what is possible and what is reality widens all the time. The cost to the ultimate source of energy and life – the eco-base – should alarm all right-thinking people. In ecological terms, the affluent world is now consuming what by right belongs to the people of tomorrow in order to respond to the hyped-up greed of today.

Cosiness:

There is a certain cosiness in the relationship which exists between the power located in centralised bureaucracy, the power located in our central institutions and the power held within the commanding heights of capitalism. Protective inter-relationships are maintained in a paradigm sustained by armies of super-specialists supported by super-technology back-up and using jargon which confuses the rest of us because we do not understand it. It is hardly surprising if those citizens, over whom the central barons wield so much power without direct accountability, feel that the political framework for challenging the oppressiveness of it all is singularly inappropriate to what is required.

Diminished People in Diminished Space:

There was a time when people would be reading *different* books and doing quite different things creatively with their hands. Today all that has changed fundamentally. Whether watching the same programmes as everyone else day in and day out or carrying out trivial and repetitive mechanical movements in a job setting, the waste of so much of a person's totality, the sheer inanity and artificiality of so much of today's employment together with the frustration and anger induced by unemployment will eventually cause social eruption on a gigantic scale. *It would therefore seem incumbent on us, before it is too late, to change the prevailing paradigm.* In doing so, do we not have to – in western society at least – address the appalling inequity in distribution of social space, at the same time as we consider how people may be empowered to enjoy and to celebrate a more proper share and ownership of it. A disturbing social gulf exists between those who can and those who cannot indulge in making elegant choices about how they are spending their lives.

Whether using but a singular fragment of their human potential or bored by repetition of a limited repertoire of high-powered action, super-specialists also, – despite the privilege of 'expert' status and sustained employment – could yet say, "enough is enough" and make a break for freedom by joining with the intelligent unemployed in a massive struggle for liberation and regeneration.

Super-Specialist Paradox

Should the above observations seem strange, perhaps the paradox of super-specialist survival in an era of such rapid change will highlight a central feature of the dilemma.

Primarily, the super-specialist responds to need determined by considerations of power, conformity, control, self-interest and projected expectation. To train to give what s/he has on offer may involve such lop-sided development of her/himself that s/he has little else to give yet, because of rapid change, *demand for such refined talent may suddenly diminish* to the point which renders a particular skill irrelevant and the person concerned potentially redundant.

No one wants to feel irrelevant or to be redundant and so the only way ahead may 'per necessity' lie in the creation of a false relevance for what s/he can do; in this respect, the more power his/her department or institution can command, the better will s/he be able to

keep his/her position by persuading people to continue to use what they may, in effect, not really need!

Many empires of so-called excellence become, in time, empires of self-sustaining yet powerful irrelevance!

Extra Parliamentary Temptation:

The social and political structures which we have are inadequate to meet the on-going challenge of an ever-changing and oft-time threatening situation in a flexible manner; parliamentary democracy has weakened. *Today, governments lobby the giant corporations and multi-nationals such as supermarkets and superstores rather than the other way round*⁶. If this state of affairs continues, extra-parliamentary activity and action will become more and more inevitable. As now practised, Parliamentary democracy is increasingly inadequate to meet current requirements without the counter-balance of **vigorous local** democracy.

- Thus far, Community democracy has not been encouraged to develop its potential, perhaps because it is too threatening to those who retain a vested interest in the status quo, perhaps because, to date, there has not been sufficient confidence in the checks and balances available to prevent corruption of power located locally. **The Community Charter** (see page 25-35) is an attempt to build in safeguards with a balance to be struck between the need for local power and the need for the counter-balance of operating within regional and national guidelines.

Fire Questions: Ecology, the priority: New Ireland - A Green Ireland?

Many questions need to be asked and many radical answers sought if those who ask the questions are to feel satisfied by the responses.

- who will charge the polluters by legal obligation to render all waste harmless?
- who will place a swingeing tax on the use of un-re-cycled paper?
- who will place a swingeing tax on the owners of buildings still unused after months of eyesore to the detriment of the morale of the local community, village, town, etc.?
- who will oblige us to use bicycles, buses, trains and trams by placing prohibitive tax on domestic transport fuel?
- who will tax, at the city's toll-gate, the unused spaces in the domestic car?
- who will dare upset the agricultural industry by promoting vigorously a pro-vegetarian dietary programme?
- what subsidy are we prepared to give to induce a rapid and significant change away from chemical and towards biological farming?

⁶Buying up Britain: George Monbiot: The Ecologist, Vol. 30, No. 8, p.30. (Nov. 2000)

and so we could go on and on!

- who will research the suspicion that there is a hidden conspiracy involving the litigation industry, commercial interests and the insurance companies?
- At this time of crisis in Health Services who will monitor the time and at - work earnings of health professionals. Are conditions and opportunities for work both within the Health Service and outside it the same for medical and other personnel working in, say, Enniskillen as they are in Belfast?
- who will be the first to undertake seriously the rationalisation of services in a de-centralist rather than a centralist direction (see page 17)? We have the technology but we are not yet programmed to reverse the centralising influence in our thinking.
- who will question the quality of justice in terms of the cost of litigation?

Centralism and the New Ireland Group:

What follows is taken from the submission which the New Ireland Group made to the New Ireland Forum back in the early 1980s.

In the early 1970s, Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote a series of letters to the Soviet leaders in which, among many other things, he appealed for a return to the 'autonomous Soviet'.

In one of these letters Solzhenitsyn makes the following observation:-

"The present day centralisation of all forms of life of the mind is a monstrosity amounting to spiritual murder".⁷

Centralism – the main disease of our time

Society cannot exist without a centre whether at national, provincial or local level yet who would deny that the centre daily becomes bigger and more powerful and the peripheral units smaller and weaker? The centre (Dublin for example) must either be undermining opportunity for people living in communities remote from it or, alternatively, must be creating conditions of dependency or expectation around it which oblige more and more people to move towards it. As this happens, and because of population increase in and around it, the centre obtains more public representatives in parliament and these, through the present laws of representation, accrue more and more power around themselves centrally. The process becomes self-expanding and self-perpetuating.

Until very recently, this centripetal movement seemed to be unstoppable; the more remote rural communities and others, weakened by this insidious process, were being sapped of health, enterprise and vigour. Rural Community fragmentation and breakdown were obvious to all yet there seemed so little hope of changing the process; as a result, local

⁷ Letters to the Soviet Leaders: Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Collins/Harvill (1974) p. 38

confidence has been undermined. Feelings of isolation, futility, anxiety and abandonment abound in such communities. Recent rural initiatives to attract people back to the countryside and out of the cities should receive unequivocal whole-hearted and generous support from government.

With some justification, 'Western' man can be cocky about his achievements; at the same time he is disturbed by the fact that he feels so uneasy about them.

Certainly, the answer to our problems does not lie in the outright rejection of centralisation. Society will always need a centre; thus it becomes a question of re-defining every aspect of the centre's function. We should recognise what central specialised endeavour can do for us yet we should put this in perspective by examining also what it may be eroding.

Control by centralisation, sustained by our present style of technology and encouraged by super-specialism, has meant that more and more people use less and less of their total human resourcefulness. By resourcefulness we refer to the development of the inherent talent of the individual and the interaction of that talent with other individuals for collective benefit. People therefore become more and more dependent on distribution and are, at least sub-consciously, more fearful of its denial to them. The desire for equal shares in the distribution of the goodies makes them conform in order to obtain what they have been led to believe must be 'good for them'; by the same token, the fear of denial of such places pressure on them to move nearer to the centre.

In responding to this, it may be pointed out that it is from the specialised endeavour of large centrally located institutions that much of the 'excellence' upon which we depend for our standard of living has come. However, should we not be asking about the price being paid in terms of *real* living through this pursuit of unrealisable, let alone unsustainable, expectations raised by images of an ever rising standard of living? In other words are we as focussed on the quality of life and living as we are on quantifiable assessments of it.

Our system of centralisation seems to have reached a point where it has to create artificial needs to sustain itself at the expense of meeting the real need of individuals as they relate in community. As long as the system guarantees comfort, the social condition is tolerable but once that guarantee is no longer there, the system, which makes the citizen increasingly dependent and decreasingly resourceful, is bound to sow and germinate seeds of its own violent disruption. It is therefore in need of fundamental re-appraisal.

The citizen, the community and the centre: integration:-

The word integration, implying the sharing of things and participation by people, is, in the context of today, little more than a euphemism for the control of the little by the big, for it is usually undertaken by a bureaucrat or capitalist or institutionalist identifying with the larger (and therefore, in today's context, the more prestigious) rather than the smaller of the enterprises which are being 'rationalised'. Inevitably, this involves the undermining of smaller enterprise with erosion of morale – perhaps where previously high – not only of

those who were employed directly but also of others involved by association within the community which such enterprise previously served or to which it related one way or another.

The refinement of the talent of the few has become justification, at the cost of millions of pounds/dollars, for the demoralisation of many of the remainder.

Expertise has been hoarded in institutional powerhouses; little wonder that the many can but goggle at the brilliance of the few! If integration means anything, it means sharing of resources and full participation by people in decisions affecting them and their communities. Absorption plays no part in integration. Central service to the periphery must therefore replace central control over it.

Capacity:

Every individual, enterprise, community, region and nation has capacity. People also have limitations. Contrary to the implications of so many of our plans and regulations, neither capacity nor limitation are static conditions.

Capacity is expanded by the development of enterprise within in conjunction with communication without.

If we are to raise our capacity, we should encourage rather than inhibit the full development of the person. In so doing, the enterprise level of the community is raised. Capacity is further enhanced through development of co-operative activity in which each person is cherished and where two-way exchange is being constantly activated between different people, between similar enterprise in adjacent communities as well as between periphery and the centre. It is no longer relevant, in the 21st. century, to concentrate exclusively on the internal or the external, the community or the centre. By focusing on internal enterprise alone, we create isolation in the institutional and community sense and the independence of isolation in the national sense. For the individual it leads to introspection and stagnation. Separation and loneliness must, however, be distinguished from solitude and reflection which, by contrast, are conducive to creative thought and action.

On the other hand, by perpetuating the communication of dependency, we are perpetuating one-way systems towards the centre to sustain the needs of the centre for ever increasing our dependence on it. The concept of 'we and they', the élite and the others, is of an era past. In the transition we now blame all that goes wrong on 'they' which is worse for we do not know who 'they' are and, in the final analysis, it is really us! Balance will arise once we feel able to acknowledge our interdependence and become less self-conscious in giving our encouragement to **two-way** exchange and movement to come to terms with it.

Decentralisation: Autonomy:

It is of course, much easier for the centralised systems of the world to control societies which only use an infinitely small fraction of each individual's resourcefulness than it would be for them to create the conditions which would develop people in order to liberate the talents of their completeness. We should therefore be on our guard against centralist solutions, - e.g. 'the re-direction of labour'- and look instead to *community solutions*, - e.g. 'the relocation of opportunity'. The centralist may see the solution in terms of 'de-centralisation' whereas the community orientated person sees the solution in terms of 'autonomy'.

De-centralisation implies handing back as little as possible in order to keep control of as much as possible whereas autonomy implies the *taking back* of responsibility with insistence on accountability for all matters affecting the health, enterprise and esteem of the people, in community and in the region.

Interdependence: all men and women are born different, each is unique:

In a world going crazy at the centre, the statement that 'all men are born equal' has tended to imply that all men should have an equal opportunity to be the same, whereas, to meet the need of today, if it is to make sense at all, this statement should surely be restated in the following manner:-

'All men and women different, each unique, all part of the same humanity.'

How then do we find, develop and liberate the talents which are the unique inheritance of each one of us into the fabric of the society of which we are a part. (see education: page 28).

Moving from the micro- to the macro-scale, acknowledgement of interdependence becomes justification for consideration of such as cantonisation, federalism and confederalism in the intra- and inter-national affairs of the world.

The philosophy of *size and centre*, so little challenged in public consciousness before 1968, must now start to give way to a new philosophy relating to *scale and community*.

Tension, Constructive and Destructive:

Conflict arises out of tension and tension is created by difference. Without difference, however, society would stagnate. With difference, society may grow and expand or decay and disintegrate depending whether its tension is resolved constructively or destructively.

Wherever there is sufficient confidence to cope with the 'other', that person, group, tribe or nation can be perceived as a challenge. Where there is insufficient confidence, the other person, the other group, will be perceived as a threat. And so it is with change. Depending upon the rate of change and the degree to which we feel the proposed change may affect

us, we will respond in a positive outward-going and constructive manner or in a negative, defensive and destructive manner.

It follows that if we crave a response rather than a reaction we must be prepared to build up rather than undermine the confidence of those whose viewpoints may differ from ours.

Effect of Change : Rate of Change, Degree of Change:

We live in an era of most rapid change. It is important, however, to distinguish between change which is imposed from without and the change which emanates from within. We seem to have relatively limited capacity to cope with change imposed upon us. On the other hand we have perhaps infinite capacity to cope with change which emanates exclusively from within ourselves provided we retain complete control over it; in the first case, we are denied participation and in the second, our involvement is total but exclusive.

The more remote and dictatorial the decision-making process, the less likely will have been any significant participation by the ordinary citizen in it; on the other hand, the more we want change just to suit ourselves, the greater will be our isolation. Somewhere in between, there is appropriate balance. This balance should promote participation in the health-giving decision-making process. It should also increase awareness of our interdependence.

We should therefore learn to distinguish between dependence on others, which represents authority given by us to them to act on our behalf, from dependence, which represents power usurped by them from us, in order to exercise control over us. *In this context, the leader's position is unique.* S/he should be accountable to those s/he leads; at the same time, if s/he is to lead, s/he must have the trust of the people so that s/he can move without feeling continually thwarted, as if anchored by petty audit and relentless insistence for accountability for his/her every move.

Malaise

The malaise of today is to a large degree related to competitive centralism, both the forces creating it as well as those spawned by it; ***the weapons industry of the wealthy powers is its most obscene expression.*** Its most fearful consequence, however, is the abdication of the citizen to that state of dependency which cripples him/her and leaves him/her as a diminished human being.

Centralism may impose a rate of change to which the human adaptive mechanisms cannot respond positively. This may be but one step away from its most terrible manifestation, the centralism of totalitarianism which relieves us of all hope of participation by ensuring that we will be punished if we express ourselves freely. Effective decision-making is a prime source of health and it should therefore be cherished.

It is through the expansion of citizen resourcefulness – which would require a complete reassessment and overhaul of what we promote by way of education -, it is through the increasing participation of the citizen in decision-making in all aspects of his/her life and the raising of the level of awareness that a new state of health (the state of well-being) will emerge in relation to citizen, community and centre. We are now called upon to strive to the utmost of our capacity to move in this direction so that a non-violent rather than a more violent society has a chance to emerge. In the context of today's world, anything which promotes negative destructive conflict has new horror. It is no longer a question of freedom in isolation for the few but rather the annihilation of all. By the same token, a movement in the opposite direction, if it is to make sense, demands the total involvement of all in the liberation of the talent of each.

Scale, Communication, Participation:

The smaller the size of an enterprise, the greater is the potential for increasing the proportional participation of those belonging to it yet the smaller the size the more vulnerable the enterprise to the prevailing forces of centralism. This does not deny the need for a centre but makes a plea for the redefinition of its function. The centre should be concerned to meet need rather than to dictate it, *to serve rather than to control*.

People in the centre should therefore be obliged to experience exposure to life and living in the communities and in the periphery in order to make it more likely that central endeavour, with regard to teaching, training and research, is *relevant* to need as defined by the citizen in community rather than to the requirements of 'success', status, etc. as determined by centrally determined fashion.

Likewise, people who are located in community and in the periphery should be encouraged to move in and out of the centre to learn about techniques and methodologies which may be *relevant* to work-practice and communication at local community level.

Conclusion:

Centralism has many forms. We find it in the exercise of bureaucratic and institutional power by which the enterprise of the small, the peripheral and the weak is undermined by those who seek to impose conformity for control. Institutional criteria of assessment have all too often been used as a means of exercising this control. *One of the most powerful tools in this cybernetic age is the power to determine the parameters by which the performance of others to whom one is not directly accountable is to be judged.*

We find centralism spinning its web of bureaucracy, we find centralism used to impose the ideologies of the state; we find it in the social forces built up by the state, ostensibly to protect us from the excesses demanded by the commanding heights of capitalism yet, all too often, used to promote the self-interest involved in sustaining such heights. Centralism, thus far, has been sustained by the cult of the expert, the philosophy of the super-specialist working hand in glove with super-technology which seems to be geared by and large to respond to size rather than to scale.

Yet, the new technology could be the means of decentralising society.

Today, we know that relatively inexperienced surgical trainees may carry out surgical operations under the Antarctic Ice cap⁸ because they can be monitored by satellite through radio-communication and audio-visual television control in the Department of Surgery in Aberdeen. In other words, our technology should, more and more, be used to meet need determined by people where they live and work rather than as a tool to control them. It could become a most powerful resource in the promotion of sustainable autonomy in the battle against the dehumanising effects of either or both institutional imperialism and bureaucratic centralism.

One of the great ironies of the late 20th, early 21st. centuries must surely lie in the knowledge that we have a technology which has transported man to the moon and back to earth yet a woman can no longer have a baby in County Tyrone or County Monaghan!

‘Rationalisation’ does not have to mean further centralisation; it could also be achieved by decentralisation!

Liberation, not further centralisation could be source of new social energy for the realisation of potential in the development of our capacity, collectively.

MORE THAN ONE ECONOMY

GNP/GDP

Economists in the ‘developed’ world - the world of the wealthy people and the powerful people - never cease to remind us about trends in GNP and GDP. In terms of what the growth barons of bureaucracy and capital define for us as ‘success’ it sometimes seems that these two yardsticks - GNP and GDP - are the only worthwhile means of assessing achievement.

Increase in measured consumption and material growth has not been achieved without a cost - power and plenty for the few, poverty for the many and pollution for us all. ‘Achievement’: ‘success’, at ‘all costs’, usually means ‘at the cost of someone else’! Even if the present generation is not already paying a crippling price for this obsession with growth, the next generation and those lucky enough to survive it, will most certainly have to do so!

In the final analysis, the objectives of our materialistic world are unsustainable in terms of global population going on 8,000,000,000 people (eight thousand million people). The economic machines scream out for ‘more, ever more’, ‘faster, ever faster’ yet instinct and the promptings of Being, buried ever deeper in each one of us, appeal to us to slow down, to take less and to share it better before it is too late.

^{8a} As confirmed by a student, Brian O’Callaghan, Medical School University of Freiburg

^{8b} Lecture given by member of Academic staff, Dept Surgery, Aberdeen to the Viking Surgeons annual gathering at Elgin, Morayshire, (1989)

Whatever model we now choose to restore balance between people, between people and the natural world and within the natural world, that model must aim to preserve the economic eco-base by encouraging a much deeper reverence for the products of creation - natural resources and natural power - and, at the same time, give appropriate value to and renewed appreciation of our intangible assets - morale, enthusiasm, commitment, co-operative activity and so on.

Assets: Tangible and Intangible. Resources: Replenishable and Unreplenishable.

Tangible assets can be quantified; intangible assets defy quantification. In our obsession with measurement, we allow the 'experts' to hold the power to determine the parameters by which the performance and life-style of the rest of us are to be judged even though such 'experts' may not be directly accountable to us. Furthermore, the intangible assets are not amenable to such assessment. There are also assets of great value in the hidden economy - assets contained in the familial, community and social structures - household work, horticulture, subsistence agriculture, volunteer work, community work and the tending to precious resources in a manner which makes it more likely that they will also be available for future generations.

Some of these resources are exhaustible (turf) and others replenishable (wood); those that are replenishable will only remain so just as long as we respect nature's built-in, self-regulating systems for disposal, re-cycle and re-growth. Until recent times these eco-systems had ensured the re-cycling of the products of production and consumption in such a way that replenishable sources of food, energy and fuel were being conserved and exhaustible sources were not being exploited at the present alarming rate. It is perhaps timely to remind ourselves of the eco-principle described in 'Blueprint for Survival'⁹: "*The more complex and the more diverse the eco-system, the more stable it is*"

In the past, *Homosapiens was limited in his/her use of natural resources by his/her personal energy and strength. Homo-mechanicus, on the other hand, has now the means available to exploit and destroy the future for short-term advantage in the present.*

A Black Economy.

The ideal economy is *an economy of well-being*. By focusing on this objective, society could re-order itself to make trading in the 'black' economy seem less and less attractive as alternative. Through raising self-confidence and through increasing opportunity for self-expression, self-esteem through collective empowerment could rise to the point where *well-being* rather than misplaced expectation might become the new target for our energies. Negative feelings of 'failure' and disappointment encourage participation in the black economy. The negative energies attracted to it and the entrepreneurial skills presently captured within it could instead become re-directed towards well-being in belonging: *the right to Be tempered by the need to Belong.*

⁹ A Blueprint for Survival: Editors of the Ecologist, Penguin Books (1972), p19

The Eco-Challenge: Trust and Trusteeship in the Local Community.

If we are to have relevant meaning in relation to the new context surrounding what our forbears have handed down to us in trust we should try to honour the privilege of trusteeship by responding positively and consistently to the eco-challenge not just at international meetings or through learned debate by intellectuals on T.V. screens but **together collectively in our local communities**. That, however, poses the even greater challenge of creating confidence in the feeling that such local participation will produce results and that life is so worthwhile in the local community that people will want to preserve and expand it by enriching it with what they themselves can bring to it.

In relation to what our forbears handed on to us in trust we should never cease to ask ourselves whether or not we are the worthy trustees of it. Evidence is there for all to see that the eco-systems are in danger of being stretched beyond the limits of their self-regulation and recovery. The outer world may be a monument to our ingenuity yet the inner world is in turmoil. In such lop-sidedness there are portents of self-destruction. Let us, therefore, take the urgent warning signs *deadly* seriously so that we may go forward in the 21st century with renewed optimism.

It is from the inner world that we will find resources to promote the balance that will give us a new meaning for life, living and continuity on the planet in the century ahead.

Perhaps a pointer is to be found in the conjunction of a suggestion distilled from the reading of Solzhenitsyn's Gulag experience¹⁰ and the content of his Nobel Prize winning lecture¹¹, that *the future will depend on our ability to change society from outside in as we change ourselves from inside out.*

As E. F. Schumacher indicated in his seminal work¹², the forward stampede is the road to nowhere; it is time to join 'the homecomers' and to tend to the embers in the hearth before its warmth disappears altogether. Otherwise, in a world with a rapidly increasing population in which there has been an exponential rise in consumption by the most powerful of its peoples, it could well be that resources will be used up by the rich long before the poor have any hope of sharing them. Unlimited expectations cannot be met from limited finite resources. Short-term economic or political gain to meet, in the most expedient manner, lop-sided demand may well be spelling out long-term ecological disaster.

^{10a} The Gulag Archipelago: Collins and Harvill: III. Ch. 12 - Knock, Knock, Knock, pp357-374

^{10b} The Gulag Archipelago: Collins and Harvill: IV. Ch. 1 - The Ascent, pp 597-617

¹¹ Aquarius (Everyman): Solzhenitsyn Nobel Lecture: City View Press Ltd. pp 17-25

¹² SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL a study of economics as if people mattered: E.F.SCHUMACHER: Blond & Briggs Ltd. (4th.,1974), pp288

Standard of Living: Quality of Life.

Share today, conserve for tomorrow could be a slogan for an economy of well-being. Ireland's role in the world would be an unworthy one were it merely to subscribe to the raising of expectations for those higher standards of living which most of humankind cannot enjoy; Ireland's role could, on the other hand, be realised through an insistence on self-realisation of the person, collective community development, respect for the environment, fair access to resources without squandering them and right of access to a fair share of available social space and opportunity.

People need to feel that there is a fair allocation in the provision of opportunity to do creative work, to participate in creative leisure and to enjoy community enrichment through celebration together. **They also require the appropriate quantum of power to ensure that their participation at local level becomes an effective means of altering reality for the better.**

Restoration of balance will require a determination to ensure that knowledge is not only available but also easily accessible to all, that awareness is promoted through shared experience and that power is re-distributed in such a way that people will want to participate because of confidence in the effective outcome of such participation.

Knowledge is indeed now available through the internet for all who can afford to buy a computer. Yet knowledge on its own is not enough. Taking the time to know - say, mountains and countryside - at the expense of time to experience directly is to place limits on human awareness and on the potential for growth and development of inherent ability and talent.

EMPLOYMENT AND FULFILMENT

On-going Citizen's Enquiry:

Central to any discussion on powerlessness and the creation of a novel communitarian politic devised to tackle it, must be the need to sustain acceptable levels of employment on the understanding that unemployment is almost invariably associated with social deprivation and degradation, loss of personal dignity and feelings of isolation and futility.

Constant Re-Evaluation:

In this post-industrial, high-technology era on-going thought concerning the challenges of work, as distinct from employment, must continue and should be developed through the promotion of regular think-tanks, enquiries at local fora, all part of an open process similar to that which was conducted by the Opsahl Commission in Northern Ireland in 1992¹³ (see page 25-35 of this pamphlet.)

¹³A Citizens' Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland edited by Andy Pollak: Lilliput Press for Initiative '92

Action, if it is to be appropriate, implies awareness of the fundamental change in paradigm which has overtaken work and employment as a result of the new technology. Many people are confused by this change not least because it is a painful challenge to all previous understanding of the 'job-work ethic'. For example, the idea of *a job for life* is now dated and has been replaced by the objective of *skills for life*. On-going debate in each community and at every work place is vital if we are to raise awareness about what is happening and how to respond. *Regardless of how well intentioned, plans passed down from on high, will fail unless there is a significant input from the people for whom such plans are being devised; a dependency culture is part of the social pathology which must now be addressed.*

Principle of Subsidiarity:

In a seminal lecture at St. Angelo's College, Sligo, on Friday, March 5th 1993, Bishop Thomas Finnegan, in dealing with the social problems of Ireland, alluded to the Principle of Subsidiarity and reminded us that much of the agitation for subsidiarity had been by national politicians anxious to prevent further seepage of their power in the direction of Europe yet there had been little evidence of the same concern when it came to the position of powerlessness in the local communities of their own countries.

Loosely stated, the Principle of Subsidiarity implies that the big and central should not do for the small and peripheral what the small and peripheral may do for themselves. This provides further support for the argument that the central institutions of the state should be there to respond to need defined by the citizen where he/she lives and works rather than to determine for that citizen what her/his needs should be. By adopting the latter approach, it is but a short step for the same central institutions to manipulate society to ensure that it receives, in the main, that which vested interest determines and then dictates that it shall have.

Back in the 1970s, Professor Ivor Browne was one of the first to warn about the issue of increasing powerlessness as we entered the high-technology, post-industrial era. He was one of the few who moved beyond analysis and proposal towards *action* in his endeavour to come to terms with the new perspectives and, in particular, the effect that they would have on individual and collective well-being. Unfortunately, not too many people were listening:-

“the real struggle that is going on in the world is not between right and left, between socialism and capitalism, between church and state, but between the individual and the relentless transfer of power and control from the peripheral to the central, from the small to the large, from the personal to the anonymous and the institutional.”

Barren Planet: Barren People:

As this high-technology era evolves, it goes without saying that the **total** number of hours in conventional industrial employment world-wide must be brought down otherwise, through consumption and pollution, we will render the planet barren. The problem

therefore will not be solved by thinking only in terms of jobs and employment in the conventional sense - of looking at the week purely as a source of work hours or of pay packet rises in terms of percentages. A rise, by a particular percentage, could in our capitalist driven world, result in executives receiving as much in *their* rise as work floor personnel receive annually!

In contemplating the consequences of a quantum reduction in total hours of industrial production employment there is a danger. Governments, which fear disorder and unpopularity, would be naturally tempted to canvass expedient solutions which might be based on the transfer of people from conventional hours of employment on production lines to conventional hours of employment in the so-called service industries or in the business of data-processing and data-manipulation; the latter suggests that more and more people will be employed to authenticate by audit etc. the outcome of the norm set by decisions made by fewer and fewer at the 'top'. **In this cybernetic age the power to select the parameters by which the performance of others is judged has, become a very powerful tool indeed.**

A demand for much more direct accountability of all decision-makers to those affected by their decisions is more relevant than ever; as such, **'accountability' should now become the rallying cry of a new generation of radically-minded people all over the world** - and why not continue to encourage the start which has already been made in this respect here in Ireland?

Long March for Action - A Moment of Truth:

In addition to those who are lucky enough to hold onto jobs - often through compromising their sanity, conscience and health in general - there are still many people in the western world and elsewhere without jobs. Should the disaffected underclass decide to co-ordinate - and with contemporary means of communication technology such is a realistic possibility - and if, through such communication, they were to march respectively on Stormont Castle, Leinster House, Westminster and the European Commission Offices in Brussels and then sit down until the social order changes there would be unpalatable action one way or another! Well, not surprisingly to the authors of the New Ireland Group's submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation (1995), we anticipated just such a happening as occurred at recent global meetings of the G.M. group of capitalists¹⁴.

Far better, therefore, to create the conditions for a new order in which central institutions are obliged to respond much more effectively to changing social need in a dynamic, appropriate, flexible and humane and directly accountable manner. The definition of such need by people where they live and where they work will of course require also to be tempered by other considerations relating to those who live elsewhere in the same community and district as well as the adjacent communities and districts etc.

¹⁴The De-partitioning of Ulster: Re-formation in Ireland: NIG submission to The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation (1995) p 72-73).

The alternative, a slide towards disorder and social chaos seems so imminently possible that it is beholden on responsible government and responsible citizenry to devise means of addressing the issue *now* rather than waiting until the effects of not doing so begin to spin out of control.

A New Human Right:

In addition to devising a Community Charter (see page 25) to raise awareness, to increase social, economic and political knowledge and to restore an appropriate quantum of power for local and workplace decision-making, questions also need to be asked about the possibility of devising a new human right - *the right of access to a fair share of necessary employment and local social opportunity in the pursuit of creative work and leisure.*

Fair Involvement, Balanced Employment:

In the context of industrial society, unemployment was a scourge; in the context of post-industrial, super-technology society, failure to provide opportunity for creative work, failure to ensure a fair share of available employment, and failure to provide the means of effective political participation in decision-making together with the inequitable distribution of products and profits makes *a travesty of the words “justice and equal opportunity” and a mockery of those who do so little to promote them yet preach “law and order” at the same time.*

It is vital to distinguish between work and employment and, in this new era, to change the emphasis from full employment vis-a-vis unemployment to one of necessary employment to meet the basic needs of humankind allied to a philosophy of equal opportunity, for creative work, fair distribution and enlightened conservation.

Service rather than control should be the thrust and the people who are at the mercy of today's remote decision-makers must insist that the new technology will serve need defined by them and that those who presently hold power will find it increasingly difficult to dictate to the people what their need should be.

The New Ireland Group's

Ten Point

Community Charter

for

A new Democracy

in

A New Ireland

COMMUNITY CHARTER : TEN POINTERS

1. TRIPARTITE CO-OPERATIVE COUNCILS (THE CO-OPERATIVE COUNCIL)

Following the hey-day of Thatcherism, the Trades Union Movement seemed to be losing its way in search for relevant direction. Perhaps then it is timely to suggest that institutional democracy might become the spearhead of a new trade unionism; indeed, Work Place Unionism could be a better title than Trade Unionism.

Larger Enterprise:

A Co-operative Council should be constituted in all of those institutions/work places which employ more than a critical number of personnel. Such Co-operative Councils would consist of (a), representatives of the working personnel, (b), representatives of consumers as well as of other people from the local community and (c), key figures from management.

- a). Working personnel: An Annual General Meeting of **all** working personnel to be convened for the purpose of electing a *working personnel committee*, one of whose purposes would be to nominate members to serve on *the Co-operative Council*. A written constitution (see below) to be drafted for ratification by weighted majority vote of the entire working personnel of the institution/work place concerned.
- b). Local consumer/ local citizens: An Annual General Meeting open to all consumers and affected local citizens to be convened for the purpose of electing a *citizens committee* one of whose purposes would be the nomination of members to serve on *the Co-operative Council*. For any given community/district one ‘umbrella’ citizens’/ consumers’ committee might adequately cover all work places. This Annual General Meeting to be advertised in advance in the local district press or further afield if such is deemed appropriate and an appropriate constitution to be drafted for ratification by weighted majority vote (see below).
- c). Key figures in management: These should reflect the interests of ownership and obligation - state, capital, private, professional etc. and must include persons who are clearly seen to represent special interests in the organisation, e.g. shop stewards, staff hierarchy, professional organisations and so on.

Smaller Enterprise:

In smaller enterprises, employing fewer than a critical number of personnel, it should be mandatory to hold a meeting of all personnel on a monthly basis in order to raise awareness, to inform and to discuss the implications of any significant development as well as other matters of concern to management and/or workforce. At least once each year there should be an open meeting for all personnel in conjunction with interested members of the local community so that impact and inter-reaction may be ventilated and debated for the mutual benefit of all; should there be an ‘umbrella’ local citizens’ committee(see b, above) representation from it might be invited.

Written Constitution:

The co-operative councils, the personnel and citizen committees should be obliged to draw up duly ratified constitutions outlining their standing orders with provision for regular review, amendment and re-ratification. The need to make allowance for the co-option of local persons with special expertise should be considered.

Democratisation of the work place in parallel with democratisation of the local community is a challenge worthy of the Trade Union Movement at a time of such fundamental change in work practice, in employment and in the social condition of so many estates and communities.

2. COMMUNITY GUILDS

Networking:

As a result of the tensions and reassessment which have taken place during the most recent 30 years, many agencies, associations, support groups etc. have sprung up in different communities throughout Northern Ireland. The 'voluntary' sector has had an increasingly high profile. *Yet, in many instances, such groups may even yet be unaware of each other's existence.*¹⁵ The formation of community guilds would be one means whereby, on a regular basis, **the statutory and the voluntary agencies set up to deal with a particular aspect of community life would be encouraged to form a network** for discussion, debate, resource sharing and collective formulation of plans for action.

Such networking guilds could be set up in any number of citizen social areas, e.g. health, education, the environment, policing, the media, work, employment, resources, leisure, etc. etc.

The inter-agency meetings held by many of our locally constituted community associations would seem to have similar objective and should be able to give advice and show the way.

Health as an Example:

One can imagine a debate on the subject of health as a 'state of well-being' when fundamental questions would be asked about control, priority, distribution of funding, appropriate training, equitable spread of man & womanpower, overall organisation in relation to locality and the many effects of the impact of professional and other forms of institutional imperialism.

¹⁵The De-partitioning of Ulster: Re-formation in Ireland: NIG submission to The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation (1995) p77).

In the first line of his great treatise, Medical Nemesis, Ivan Illich states, ‘the medical establishment has become a major threat to health’.¹⁶ With this assertion, David Horrobin^{16b} agrees; in spite of being one of Illich’s harshest critics, he agrees with him in this assertion. To what extent is this true; what motivates the bureaucratic establishment who now control health? Can we indeed define health as a state of well-being and if so, are we using the correct parameters by which to assess successful delivery of a health service? ‘Well-being’ challenges to consider many aspects of society - health and social services, education and development, ecology and trusteeship, pollution and poverty, creative opportunity, ownership and use of resources and so on.

Education as another Example:

Production line certification should be challenged with much more focus on the need for whole person and collective community development in preparation for integrated family life in a community context.

There is no end to the subject matter which could be ventilated and there should be no limit imposed upon such discussion. The citizen in a healthy society should be encouraged to think clearly and articulate succinctly on his/her feet in debate without rancour with or from others.

The Burns report¹⁷ is well worthy of much more open public discussion.

Methods of continuous non-examination assessment in co-operative dialogue between pupils, parents, professionals and other providers of ‘life opportunity’ to be encouraged in relation to the overall locally available educational resources.

The means of meeting the variety of needs created by the requirement to develop as fully as possible the talents of *different* pupils should surely underly the object of school education. The concept of the ‘Collegiate’ must not continue to be glibly dismissed unless it can be shown to fail to meet the need of pupils in terms of choice in education and overall development. It is certainly worthy of a good trial!

Ownership, Use and Abuse of Resources:

At such guilds, we might promote debate on the use and ownership of resources – how is the land used in community, how is it owned, who profits from its currency? The same could be asked of buildings and of waterways. Is it easy for the ordinary citizen to note at a glance how each stretch of water, each piece of land, each local building is owned and managed? Who possesses its title, who profits from its use and how? What proportion of such profit is ploughed back into the local community, what proportion is siphoned off elsewhere? To what extent does the local community gain or lose from the underused ownership of a second place of domicile?

^{16a} Limits to Medicine, Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health: Ivan Illich: Marion Boyars Ltd. (1977): page 3

^{16b} Medical Hubris: A Reply to Ivan Illich: David F. Horrobin: Churchill Livingstone (1978): chap. 11, page86

¹⁷ The Burns Report: Education for the 21st. Century: Report by the Post-Primary Review Body: Oct. 2001.

With what are the waters polluted and where is the source of such pollution - this too should be pin-pointed in graphic form on a map in a public place for all to see. How is the land husbanded – what fertilisers are used and what are their known side effects? Where, at present, is there in-depth discussion and debate within the local community with regard to exploitation, conservation and pollution relating to the use of resources?

An open society is a lively society; a closed society is a dead one.

Power and Priorities:

Where, for example, does the power lie to shift public assets such as hospitals and schools in and out of our communities? Are the decision-makers directly accountable to those most affected by their decisions? What proportionate say should our local community have in determining its priorities while taking into account those of adjacent communities and of the wider community of which it is but one part? To what extent are we thwarted by covert as well as overt institutional imperialism and bureaucratic centralism?

Media:

How do we stand on the issue of the media – what is the balance to be struck between open investigation on the one hand and protection against unwarranted hurtful intrusion on privacy on the other? Is there a place for a media access group in each community, especially those living in the more remotely located communities? What balance is to be struck between the imperialism of media intrusion and the need for freedom and openness?

Commitment: Commuters:

A community thrives on commitment rather than on commuters. Are people doing their job to serve the community in which they live or doing it as a means of using the community as a springboard towards a more central and, in today's terms, more prestigious location? How do we address this trend? What has the organisation for the re-location of city dwellers in rural districts got to say about these matters?

How should the community relate to the state as a whole so that the most appropriate use is made of scarce resources? Do we conserve or do we squander? Are we good trustees of what has been handed down to us in trust? To what extent has fragmentation of urban social cohesion been brought on by rural depopulation?

A Peoples Input - Policing as an example:

The recently constituted District Policing Partnerships should indicate how we could deal more effectively with contentious matters regarding local services and activities. A short time ago, a problem arose in relation to vandalism affecting a resident of a local housing estate in Ballymoney. Committee members suggested that there was no point in contacting the police as they would not have the time let alone the manpower to deal with the issue. It was then pointed out that copies of a letter addressed to the Chief Superintendent could now be sent to members of the local DPP who would be under statutory obligation to explore and activate an appropriate response - an indication of how citizens may become more empowered in the future.

Waste, Pollution and Poverty:

How do we deal with waste? Have we succumbed to 'disposable mania'? In other words, have we been seduced by the pressures of consumerism to purchase non-bio-degradable disposables? To what extent is this trend acceptable and to what extent does it reflect capitulation to the unacceptable face of capitalism? Must we continue to settle for a deliberate policy of built-in obsolescence rather than one of sustainability? How do we come to terms with pollution as a result of excess consumption and with poverty because of inappropriate distribution?

3 COMMUNITY FORUM

The establishment of community fora should be encouraged to provide a central focus for open public debate on issues of local public concern. Through the establishment of such fora, chosen topics of community importance could be ventilated as necessary. Such a forum, to be successful, would meet on a minimum number of occasions (say twice) annually. This would be a further means of raising consciousness about social, economic, environmental and other issues throughout the local district. *Incentives for attendance could be tried as a means of attracting participation in the first instance*, e.g. free vouchers for the local leisure centre etc.! **A forum convenor** should be elected on an annual basis at the first forum meeting of each succeeding year and in accordance with a duly ratified constitution which would also indicate how all other arrangements should be effected.

The main purpose of the forum should be to ensure that burning social issues receive public consideration and heightened public profile in order to raise the awareness due to them. After all, we are meant to be living in a mature democracy! **The present anti-lignite campaign in North Antrim which has created well-informed and open public debate about ecological implications is an example of how a community may benefit from such fora.**

In addition to the community forum convenor, a press/media officer, a local outreach publicity officer, a forum meeting organisational secretary and topic workshop convenor (see below) should be elected/appointed. A period of years (say three) should be stipulated as the maximum duration of consecutive Community Forum office-bearing membership.

4. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

To ensure that the issues raised at the meetings of the community guilds and community fora do not die at the conclusion of a night's discussion and debate, it is necessary to have a plan for action.

Therefore, at the conclusion of each guild and forum meeting, a topic workshop convenor, secretary/treasurer and two or three others should be elected to establish at least one public community workshop at which the particular topic which has undergone consideration will be subjected to further scrutiny in greater depth and in smaller groups. Such workshops would be open to the public and would sustain outreach through *the publication of workshop news-sheets circulated locally.*

5. CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAUX

Not so very long ago – and certainly within living memory – Citizens' Advice Bureaux seemed threatening to the established political order in that the citizen could be empowered to do and question things from which elected representatives, previously, might have gained kudos for achievement on the citizen's behalf. More recently, however, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, now part of the social fabric, have been suffering from the effect of decreasing funding.

So that the citizen may have access to appropriate information on which to base subsequent judgement and action, Citizens' Advice Bureaux interlinked by advanced communication technology, should have an increasingly significant role to play as back-up to the Co-operative Councils, Community Guilds, the Community Forum and the Community Workshops. With sophisticated Citizens' Advice Bureaux, linked into effective library and audio-visual network services, there would be less perceived need for national politicians, (MP's or TD's), to act as message boys in response to many problems which have traditionally been brought by constituents to local party political 'clinics'.

The Citizens' Advice Bureaux should be in a position to inform all constituents accurately as to their entitlement under the law. Politicians should no longer be able to capitalise on their constituents' ignorance of entitlement. *Political capital should not be gained by confirming for constituents that to which they are legally entitled and then taking credit for it!*

Likewise, there should be no question whatsoever of politicians being able to obtain for any constituent that to which the constituent is not legally entitled.

If, on the other hand, there is no legal provision by which the particular problem may be resolved, then the elected politician should be using her/his energies to explore the possibility of having inadequate law changed for the better by debate in parliament.

The accelerated development of advice bureaux would be an important factor in dealing with the form of political clientellism which is so rife in political life in the Irish Republic. The bureaux should be a resource easily accessible and readily available to everyone regardless of their level of fluency and literacy.

6. 'COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS'

Ward Associations And The Local District Borough Council:

All citizens living in a particular ward should be invited to at least one open

association meeting per annum in order to elect members to a **local ward association committee**. In Northern Ireland, there are 26 local government districts and 582 wards. Each ward is composed of townland and/or neighbourhoods (parks, avenues, drives, roads, etc.); for example, there are over 80 townlands in the Ballymartrim ward of the local government district of Armagh whereas there are only around 20 in the ward of Carrigatuke.

Locally defined communities e.g., particular housing estates, townlands etc. should be encouraged to form duly constituted **Community Associations** and these should be encouraged to participate actively at Ward Association meetings if indeed they are not actually co-terminus with the ward itself.

People are more extensively educated than formerly; through communication technology and the media they should also be much more aware of issues. It is therefore appropriate that we should consider and continually re-consider how representation on the district councils might be improved through the election of independent community candidates as distinct from party political candidates. In local councils in Northern Ireland a lot of time and energy is spent debating matters for which the council has no statutory responsibility but in which, nevertheless, established political parties have vested interest in expressing a point of view.

The local ward association committee would be in a position to put forward candidates for all local government elections. In this respect, ward associations would seem to have much to gain through networking with each other in order to give more concerted support for independent ward candidates.

As there is a natural tendency by politicians, regardless of how they are elected, to form groups in order to accrete power, any drive towards more independent representation locally would indeed require on-going scrutiny and constant injections of novelty if the purpose of peoples' empowerment through broadening their opportunity is to be sustained.

7. SIMPLIFIED COMMUNITY TAX SYSTEM

A community tax system could be designed to yield sufficient economic power to ensure that participation may lead to effective action and to do so in a manner whereby such action would be taken within obligatory constraints as have been indicated by agreed regional and national guidelines.

In advocating a community-orientated form of economic re-structuring, it is important to recognise that, beyond a critical quantum, the devolution of power to the local community is not without its dangers! Built-in safeguards in the form of well designed checks and balances are essential if we are not to run the risk of handing over power to the possibility of corruption locally; for that reason, wisdom dictates that strongly built-in safeguards are

vital to the achievement of open local government and vibrant local community democracy.

The proposal outlined below is aimed at illustrating how a shift of economic power for collective decision-making could become the basis of more responsibility, accountability, enterprise and self-esteem within the local community and to do so in such a way as to promote awareness of complementary energies in adjacent communities; after all, each is only a part of the wider community to which we all belong. The over-riding objective should be an obligation placed on the central institutions of the state to establish a co-ordinating and servicing role rather than a controlling one; gradually, the centre would come to perceive itself as responding to need determined by people where they live and work rather than, as now, dictating to them what their needs should be. Furthermore, the preservation of difference rather than the promotion of uniformity should enhance the vigour of society as a whole.

It is therefore proposed that tax levied from each individual – for whatever reason – might be distributed in some manner similar to what follows:-

- 5% to European government
- 10% to central government of the nation state
- 20% to regional government within the nation state
- 40% to local government within each region

This would leave 25% over to be used as a sum which could be shifted by central management on a sliding-scale to improve the balance between economic power of privileged communities/districts and the economic power of the more deprived communities/districts.

Thus, in relation to all aspects of life and living wherever they work and wherever they are domiciled, people would be handed back economic power to determine priorities in a democratic manner within overall regional, national and supra-national guidelines., **Within the guidelines devised to prevent locally generated mis-use of power there should be maximum devolution of it.**

Reservations!

In making this proposal one is keenly aware of the limitations of not being an economist. The percentage figures chosen are therefore merely chosen to illustrate the general direction in which we might move and are therefore open to criticism and amendment. Nevertheless, the figures are presented in order to illustrate the general thrust of the proposal.

'Participation' would no longer be the sop to frustration which it has been too often in the past; people would become more aware of identifiable economic power which they could mobilise for action to be taken collectively on their behalf. They would also become aware

of how this quantum of power could relate positively to other energies available in adjacent communities and might learn to share in order to expand.

The guidelines to which reference has been made should in turn relate to the share today, conserve for tomorrow philosophy previously mentioned; this is central to the thrust of the new deal we are advocating – the right to BE tempered by the need to BELONG with the obligation to share to-day and to conserve for tomorrow.

This re-distribution of economic power for collective decentralised decision-making is essential if proposals to redistribute political power are not to remain high-minded sentiment with no cutting edge.

8. NATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE

A voluntary period of national social service for school leavers should be given serious consideration¹³. Not so many years ago it was quite unusual for young people leaving school to take the ‘year out’ which is now common place. Properly organised this year may provide valuable opportunity for increasing awareness and of promoting personal development. Incentives and imaginative programming should aim to encourage all of our young people to participate. A ceremony and appropriate awards in recognition of satisfactory completion of a post-school year, might be considered. Choice should be free to select from a wide range of options.

The possibilities are endless. Rural young people exposed to work in an urban setting and vice versa. Young people in the north working in the south and vice versa. Voluntary service on an exchange basis with young people in other parts of the world. Work with the handicapped, community work with the elderly, work in the courts, work with organisations involved in the rehabilitation of prisoners, work in association with policing, work on the sea, work on the land, work in hospitals and so on. *The objective should be to ensure that never again can it be said in Ireland that, “the one half doesn’t know how the other half lives” or worse, “that they barely understand the language which others speak”.*

The song, dance, music, language, legend and history of Ireland’s many different local traditions might be part of this process in particular for those young people who didn’t have opportunity to be exposed adequately to these during the period of their growing up.

¹³New Ireland: Sell Out or Opportunity: J.D.A.Robb (1972) p. 39, 40.

9 COMMUNITY RADIO NETWORK

In this era of new communication technology the value of radio as a focus for a number of communities working together and as an outreach to others should be recognised by all. So that cohesion rather than confusion in such communication should govern how this may be effected, some central organisation and support would be required to co-ordinate and to sustain such a service.

10 NETWORKING

The late E.F.Schumacher would almost certainly have viewed any ideal 'centre' as the axle of a wheel rather than the apex of a pyramid. He thought of himself as a crank for he said, a crank is a small object, man-made and it creates revolution!!

Alliances of common enterprise of similar scale in different communities coming together collectively to make common cause is vital to their survival and for far too many it is already too late. Small, peripheral and weakly supported enterprises, especially those operating in states of isolation, can all too easily be picked off one by one by the big, the powerful and the central of to-day's world and will remain vulnerable until they can develop a new dynamic in networking for collective political effect. *Perhaps this is where the stimulus provided by active participation in Institutional and Local Community Democratisation will increasingly have a role to play. Many small cranks; one gigantic revolution!*

PRICE

50p