

Letter to World Citizens

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I received in the mail the other day a remarkable document entitled “Financing Planet Management” by Alanna Hartzok. Its subtitle is “Sovereignty, World Order and the Earth Rights Imperative.” It was first published in January 1994 by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation in New York. Mine was the second edition, dated January 1995.

Hartzok co-chaired the alternative economic commission at a recent conference on global governance sponsored by the Association of World Citizens and the Campaign for a More Democratic United Nations.

Her document’s thesis is succinctly stated in its final sentence: “The Earth is the birthright of all people.” If the policies of the planet are to be based on fairness rather than force, Hartzok writes, “then equal rights on earth must become the guiding principle, the sovereign, supreme rule.”

In her view, today’s global imbalance between haves and have-nots is the main dilemma facing would-be world peacemakers. My own view is that this is *one* of the main dilemmas facing us.

“Before a global authority, be it a reformed United Nations or a federal world government, can be trusted to wield power benignly,” Hartzok maintains, “the problem of the current undemocratic control of the earth must be addressed.” Agreed.

She follows with a recitation of evidence for this imbalance:

- A U.N. study of 83 countries showed that less than five percent of rural landowners control three-quarters of the land;
- In the United States, the best estimates suggest that about three percent of the country’s population owns 95 percent of all privately held land;
- According to a 1985 Brazilian government report, two percent of the country’s landowners control 60 percent of its arable land while close to 70 percent of rural households own little or no land. A mere 342 farm properties in Brazil encompass a total of 183,397 square miles—an area larger than California.

Although I have written much over the years about democratizing ownership of the tools of modern technology, I confess to having neglected the issue of monopoly of land ownership. Hartzok insists, however, that “to speak of enforceable world law is to speak of world power.” And certainly whoever owns the land exerts power over those who are landless. In her words, “We have not yet extended democratic principles down to the ownership and control of the earth.”

So true.

But Hartzok is not merely bewailing and blasting. She puts forward the vision of “land value taxation,” a policy of collecting rent “for the benefit of the community as a whole.” In other words, the “‘common wealth’ finances the commonwealth.”

Well and good, but how do we get from here to there?

If we fail to tax land values for the common fund, she says, “the concentrated control of earth in the hands of the few will continue unmitigated, thus advancing the conditions of social turmoil which too often burst into flames of hatred, murder and war.”

She then analyzes the strangling policies that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund apply in regard to money supply and debt repayment in the developing world. “Morally and ethically,” she charges, “a vast amount of the funds of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank represent a theft from the global commons.

“Unless a reformed or empowered United Nations or other world government is built firmly upon the principle of equal rights for all to our planet,” Hartzok continues, “then both the government and the planet will be controlled by a handful of vested interests. It is up to the intellectual leadership of the world order movement to grapple with this issue NOW - to stop hedging and waiting for the messiah of world government to descend.”

In the chapter, “Who Owns The World?” in my book, “World Government, Ready Or Not,” I make the claim that world citizens are world owners. Hartzok doesn’t refer to world citizenship in precisely those terms, but she does maintain that “the mandate of a benevolent yet powerful, sovereign, global governmental body must be to protect the property rights of the bodies of individuals as well as the products of their labor (private property), as well as to protect and to fairly share our common body, Mother Earth.”

I heartily subscribe to that philosophy, as I do to that of economic abundance a la Buckminster Fuller as outlined in his “Critical Path.”

My only criticism of Hartzok’s thesis is that she, like many good-willed theoreticians, fails to condemn the nation-state as the political metaphor for global division and inequality. The power of the state is mainly vested in its virtual monopoly of violence and the instruments of destruction—i.e., armed forces and their appropriation of vast territories, resources and technologies. So long as anarchy prevails among states, their claim to sovereignty pertains and endures.

Hartzok’s work on planetary management includes this particularly apt passage: “I am appealing to my brothers and sisters in the world-order/planetary peace and justice movements to deeply consider the fundamental assumptions of the planet/people relationship as it concerns the entire question of land tenure. I trust that this consideration will discard both the power politics of ‘dominion,’ as well as the market construct of buying and selling our Mother Earth for private profit.”

Along with colleagues including Ross Smyth, Dr. Benjamin Ferencz, Dr. Jeffrey Segal, Jack Yost and Dr. Harry H. Lerner, I heartily commend this booklet and urge that its ideas be given serious study. Alanna Hartzok can be contacted through P.O. Box 328, Scotland, PA 17254; phone/fax: 717-263-2820.