

[Resurgence – 28 April 2006 – The Long and Winding Road](#)



I suppose I grew up with John, Paul, George, Ringo and '*Resurgence*'. It just took me a while to catch up with the seeds of exciting irreverence that *Resurgence* was to plant in my life. The magazine's explorations turned conventional ideas about economy and environment upside down. It brought the same creative turbulence into thoughts about the physical and metaphysical world as the Beatles had done to my musical world.

In truth, I was still kicking a ball about the streets of Liverpool when '*Resurgence*' was born. Your first issue followed on from the posthumous publication of Rachel Carson's '*The Sense of Wonder*' and Ralph Nader's '*Unsafe at Any Speed*' – an indictment of the US automotive industry. Four years earlier, when Rachel Carson's '*Silent Spring*' was published the reaction of farmers, agronomists and the agro-chemical industry was to accuse her of wanting to starve people by banning the use of pesticides. We were a long way from living in tune with nature.

At the time, me and my football were oblivious to all such arguments and it took me until the late 60s and early 70s to begin to catch up. What I want to reflect on though is the sense of the time in which '*Resurgence*' began and how it relates to where we are now.

It is with a sense of pride rather than apology that I freely admit to being a child of the 60s. The time brought with it a gift of optimism that has never left me. No single individual or social movement can lay claim to the spirit of internationalism and environmentalism that burst into life. It was a spirit that found a voice in anti-war protests, pro-democracy movements, liberation theology and new approaches to common ownership and industrial democracy. In an era in which the personal became the political, a carnival of musicians, poets and

writers were somehow able to embrace the dreams of a generation who wanted to live differently upon the planet... and who believed we could change the world in the fortnight or so it would take us to do it.

The environmental agenda began slowly and in the margins; often more about opting out than opting in, or being oppositional rather than propositional. By 1969 Neil Armstrong had set foot on the moon, 20 million people had died in severe famine in China and Friends of the Earth was formed. Two years later Greenpeace arrive too, but my recollection of the time was of efforts going into pollution protests and demands for increased Aid to tackle Third World poverty, rather than of demands for systematic change in our political ecology.

By the early 1970s we were running a community food co-op from our garage and involved setting up urban farms. But these were more about awareness and access to fresh food than ecological foot-printing. We still had a long way to go before catching up with Italy's Slow Food Movement or the concept of food miles. Ivan Illych's 'Energy and Equity' was the only book I can recall that questioned the energy inputs that underpinned modern life and I can still recall the buzz of excitement when listening to him (and then Paolo Friere) at meetings crowded out by those of use who thought we were part of an unstoppable social revolution. Hindsight teaches you that progress is cyclical rather than linear, that we often learn nothing from history other than how to make the same mistakes on a bigger scale, and that humanity brings to the planet a never ending struggle between individual greed and social solidarity.

By the mid 70s I had already accepted that I would only ever admit to being a 'lapsed' economist. It would be unfair to blame this on Ernst Schumaker because I had already run into serious differences about economic theory and had started to feel that most of the theories made more sense if you stood them on their head or reversed them. Schumaker's 'Small is Beautiful' simply blew everything sideways. His notion of Buddhist economics stopped me in my tracks. To redefine the whole purpose of economic life as an ethical triptych – 3 connected panels in which we live out the relationship between ourselves and our creative possibilities, between ourselves and others, and between ourselves and the planet. His ideas closed the gap that often seemed to sit uncomfortably between socialism and environmentalism.

It was 'sod's law' that I was to discover this at a time when the world was heading on a trajectory from Fordism to post-Fordism, and on to corporate globalisation. In truth, today's globalisation is really

corporate feudalism. The accelerating exploitation of people and the planet requires a massive transfer of civic rights to underpin it.

Capital and corporations are given unfettered rights beyond the reach of any enjoyed by citizens. They have the freedom to go where they like, do what they like and leave when they want. States are told it is illegal (under WTO rules) to restrict the movement of capital or the freedom of companies to take over (or abandon) whatever part of the economy they like. Lone parent companies can misbehave as much as they like, but lone parent families are to be disciplined, stigmatized, subjected to curfews or ASBOs and made the subject of a welter of state legislation to 'protect society'. Corporate feudalism demands that states micro-manage the lives of their citizens rather than macro-manage their economies.

It will all end the way that feudalism did. The difference, today, is that Climate Change crises are the most likely trigger for social revolutions that will bring corporate feudalism to an end. Explaining this will be the next stage of the '*Resurgence*' journey. Filling the process with hope and inspiration will be the litmus test of the magazine's relevance to our troubled times. The same can be said of my own journey.

I no longer believe it is possible to stop the planet drifting into deep environmental crisis. Climate Change is already happening and its impact will be exponential. My optimism about changing the world for the better has shifted to an optimism that we can still manage our way through catastrophic upheavals, in ways that allow us to live better lives by living more lightly upon the planet. It all depends on environmentalism becoming the centre stage of economics rather than an activity on the margins.

The good news is that never before in human history have we had the tools at hand to transform life for the mass of humanity rather than the few. The difficulty is that it requires a revolution in the soul of our societies in order to unleash the transformation. The big idea for the 21st century is that all of the answers are to be found in the absence of bigness. It's a bit of a bummer for today's corporate giants, but tomorrow's solutions will be found in networks and systemic interdependencies not in global behemoths.

Climate Change brings with it inseparable crises in food security, water management and energy supply. Managing our way through these crises will require a wholly new approach to systems thinking. The challenge to environmental movements is whether we can lead the

way in the politics and economics of sustainability. Big national power generation and national 'grid' energy distribution systems have to be replaced by decentralised energy networks. The built environment has to become a source of energy generation more than energy consumption. Market price mechanisms need to pay more for the sustainable energy put into energy networks than the cost of taking energy from the system.

So too with water storage, use and retention. If flash flooding and drought are to be features within the same season, the challenge is to see how the built environment can respond to both, as sources of potential energy, and can store from one in order to provide during the other. The case for local food systems taking precedence over global markets will have to be recalibrated; not simply in terms of food miles, carbon impact and producer accountability, but also as water sequestration by the richest in the North from the poorest in the South.

The internationalism of our age will not be found in an expansion of world trade. It will emerge from the cargoes of intellectual contraband that we exchange freely (without royalties or patents) on how best to survive. This is where my own journey has brought me to.

Symbolically, I look back to my childhood and believe that its greatest gifts were (and are) embodied in the Blood Transfusion Service. The sociologist, Richard Titmus, described it as 'the Gift Relationship'. We go and give blood as an act of social solidarity. When doing so, none of us asks how much we are to be paid, how much we have in our account or what interest it has earned. We give into a common process in the belief that it is the best way of meeting our common needs. Countries that have marketised the process turn citizens into commodities, cheapen every part of life they touch, and add to social insecurities.

So it is with the planet. Selfishly, the rich now need the poor to act ethically if we are all to survive. The new 'gift relationship' will require free transfers from North to South, from rich to poor, of the technologies for sustainable survival. A new economics will place the right to produce for domestic food security well before presumptions of globalised trade. The urgency of making these changes is just 'Schumaker with attitude', '*Resurgence*' with an agenda.

So, '*Resurgence*', forty years on the message is still the same. As the lads said in 1970, "the long and winding road, leads me back to your

door." There is just a greater urgency about opening it along with everyone else's.

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