

# **THE NEW POLITICS**

## **GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

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When we think of the world's future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction.<sup>1</sup>

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Is the present system of politics capable of coming to grips with all the problems governments, politicians and world leaders are faced with today? Or will it be necessary to create a new system more appropriate to the circumstances?

This is looming larger and larger as one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century. With all the difficult and demanding problems confronting political, governmental and world leaders - pollution, poverty, unemployment, the environmental crisis, huge disparities in income and wealth, increased violence and terrorism, global warming, demands for greater safety and security, the constant threat of nuclear, chemical and biological warfare, and the division of the world into two unequal parts - how these questions are dealt with is bound to have a profound effect on people and countries in all parts of the world and the world as a whole in the future. The fate of humanity and the entire planet could be at stake.

It is impossible to answer these questions without examining the historical development of the present system of politics, especially as it relates to the ideological beliefs that underlie the system and the intimate connection between economics and politics. For buried deep in this investigation are the clues that are necessary to determine whether the present system is capable of coming to grips with the debilitating problems that exist throughout the world, or whether a new system should be created that is better suited to the circumstances.

### **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM**

While many factors have contributed to the development of the present system of politics, the origins of this system can be traced back to Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*.

What makes Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations* so important in laying the foundations for the present system is the fact that they focused attention on the one thing that governments, politicians and world leaders have been most concerned with over the last two centuries and particularly over the last fifty years. *It is the creation of wealth.* No sooner was this seen as the major objective of countries than it was adopted as the principal priority of politics.

Adam Smith had strong views about the creation of wealth. In setting out his views on this subject, he developed an elaborate theoretical and practical system to show how wealth - or the necessities and conveniences of life as he called it - could be created most effectively. It is a system that still resonates with many political, governmental, and world leaders today. Included among the main elements in the system were: making economics the centrepiece of society; recognizing labour as the principal source of all value and wealth; promoting the division of labour; expanding the size of the market to facilitate labour specialization; utilizing the market as the main vehicle for discharging economic functions; facilitating as much capital accumulation, trade, and colonial development as possible; and relying on “an invisible hand” and “enlightened self-interest” to guide the economy, the marketplace, and society generally. If countries wanted to create wealth, enhance living standards, make improvements in society, and play a powerful role in the world, they should commit themselves to building an economic system equal to the task in Smith’s view.

There was little room for governments and political interference in Smith’s system. Reacting strongly to the system of mercantilism in vogue at the time - a system that involved massive governmental and political involvement in societal life - Smith advocated a system of economic and political liberalism which called for minimal intervention by governments and politicians in the affairs of nations. The government that govern best, governs least in Smith’s opinion.

By shifting attention from politics to “political economy,” Smith set in motion a chain of events that has broadened, deepened and intensified considerably over the last two centuries, so much so that it is impossible to understand the present system of politics without understanding the complex connection between economics and politics. It is a chain of events that was strengthened significantly by David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill.

This is particularly true for Ricardo, who was a politician as well as an economist. He believed economics should take precedence over politics because economic issues should always be examined before consideration is given to the political policies and practices designed to deal with them. In Ricardo’s view, economics leads and politics lags. It is a belief that is shared by many individuals, institutions, governments and countries throughout the world.

Whereas Smith believed all classes would benefit from wealth creation, Ricardo believed only one class would benefit and that was the landlord class. Moreover, it would benefit at the expense of all other classes. Ricardo's views on this subject did a great deal to expose the dual nature of the political system that was evolving in Britain and Europe at the time. On the one hand, the system was designed to create material and monetary wealth. On the other hand, it was designed to advance the interests of the rich and powerful.

While John Stuart Mill shared Ricardo's convictions with respect to the intimate connection between economics, politics, wealth and power, he arrived at very different conclusions than Ricardo concerning the role of governments and politicians in the affairs of nations. Whereas Ricardo believed governments should play a minor role, Mill believed they should play a major role. This is because Mill made a strong distinction between the laws governing the production of wealth and the laws governing the distribution of wealth. Whereas the laws governing the production of wealth are physical and technical and cannot be altered to any great extent according to Mill, the laws governing the distribution of wealth are social and human and can be changed in accordance with people's wishes. In other words, once wealth is created, societies and governments can distribute wealth any way they see fit.

This led Mill to conclude that governments should play an active role in society by redistributing wealth on a more equitable basis and implementing many social and educational programs to improve the lot of ordinary citizens. While Mill was right that societies and governments can distribute wealth as they see fit in an abstract, theoretical sense, in a practical sense, it has always been easier for governments and politicians to focus on the production of wealth than the distribution of wealth because this is a far less contentious affair and is more in keeping with the interests of the rich and powerful class in society. Nevertheless, Mill's views on this subject gave rise to a host of socialist thinkers, politicians and practitioners who followed in his footsteps, including Robert Owen, Henry George, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, G. D. H. Cole, and especially Karl Marx.

While Marx is better known today for his vigorous attacks on capitalism and evocative theories of communism, it is his economic interpretation of history and theory of economic determinism that have had the greatest impact on the world. This is because Marx claimed economics and economies are the "*cause*" and "*basis*" of everything else.

Marx made this claim by dividing societies into "economic bases" and "non-economic superstructures." The base is economic according to Marx because it is here that the material and monetary wealth is created that is needed to facilitate all other developments in society. The superstructure is "non-economic"

because it depends on the economic base for its existence. This yields a unilateral relationship between the base and the superstructure in Marx's opinion: changes that occur in the economic base can cause changes in the superstructure; *but not the reverse*. This makes economics "*cause*" and everything else "*effect*" in the Marxian perception of the world. By contending that this is true for all times and places, Marx locked the world into the economic vise it is locked in today. Everything has to do with economics to begin with, or it can be reduced back to economics in Marx's view.

This concept of "economic reductionism" quickly gave rise to the belief that economics is at the key to everything else. It is a belief that has become so powerful and pervasive in the modern world that it is taken for granted and rarely if ever discussed. Everywhere it is assumed that as economies goes, so goes the world. Not only is this deemed to be the key to satisfying people's needs *in all areas of life* and making improvements in society, but also it is deemed to be an inescapable historical fact. Hence the irony of Marx's place in history. While Marx made crucial contributions to the development of trade unions, more effective labour-management relations, and the creation of communism through his vigorous attacks on capitalism and capitalists, he opened the doors for economics, economies, capitalism, capitalists, and corporations to play a powerful role in the world through his economic interpretation of history and theory of economic determinism. This began the long process of valuing everything in terms of the contribution it makes to economies and economic growth, from education and the arts to technology and the environment.

Once the belief that economics and economies form the foundation of societies was firmly established, it was possible to shift attention to the way economies function in fact. This occurred at the last part of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century when the neo-classical economists arrived on the scene. What slowly but surely began to emerge was the belief that corporations and consumers constitute the centrepiece of economies in exactly the same way that economies constitute the centrepiece of society. This is because corporations create the material and monetary wealth that is required to "drive economies," and consumers purchase the goods and services produced by corporations.

With this came the belief that societies function most effectively when corporations maximize their profits and compete as vigorously as possible, and consumers act rationally and optimize their consumer satisfaction in the marketplace. While very different attitudes towards "wealth creation" and "growing economies" were evolving in the communist countries, in the capitalist countries, this ideal state of affairs was deemed to yield the best possible prices for producers and consumers, the greatest consumer and corporate satisfaction, the

most efficient allocation of scarce resources, and optimal rates of economic growth.

While a very different situation was evolving in the world as these ideals were being formulated - a situation characterized by incredible concentrations of wealth and power in few hands, increased inequalities in income and wealth between rich and poor countries and rich and poor people, and the growth of powerful corporations with monopolistic privileges and advantages - most economists, politicians, governments and world leaders saw this as a sign that more strenuous efforts had to be made to realize the ideal situation, rather than as an indicator that there was something seriously wrong with the system of economics and politics that was taking shape at the time.

Despite these difficulties, most people in the western world agreed the ideal state of affairs was best achieved when there was little or no governmental involvement in the economy, the marketplace, and society generally. It was felt that there was a “self-regulating” and “self-correcting” mechanism at work in the economy and the marketplace tending to restore equilibrium once there was a major deviation from it. All governments had to do was wait until the self-regulating and self-correcting mechanism kicked in to solve the problem.

Everyone knows what happened next. When the Great Depression struck in the nineteen thirties, governments and politicians waited for the self-regulating and self-correcting mechanism to restore equilibrium at or near full employment. Meanwhile, the bread lines got longer, unemployment soared, consumption and investment sagged, and economies stagnated. Clearly something had to be done.... anything. As time marched on, it became apparent that the economic elevator could just as easily get stuck in the basement as at the roof. In other words, a return to prosperity was not possible without political and governmental involvement in the economy, the marketplace, and society generally. This is exactly what happened, and most governments did. In the United States, President Roosevelt introduced the New Deal Economics and many western governments and politicians followed suit.

The person who was largely responsible for this new understanding was the economist John Maynard Keynes. Unlike Smith, Ricardo, and most of the other classical and neo-classical economists, Keynes believed governments had a major role to play in the economy and the marketplace, particularly when the economy was stuck or stalled in a recession or depression. This gave rise to “the Keynesian revolution” which eventually brought with it a great deal more governmental and political involvement in the affairs of nations.

As the Keynesian revolution intensified, governments were viewed more and more as principal players in the economy and the marketplace, along with corporations and consumers. Everything depended on the level of aggregate demand, or the sum total of consumption, investment, and government expenditure. While most of the impetus for economic growth came from consumers and corporations - consumption and investment - Keynes and the Keynesians believed governments had a strong *economic* role to play in society by controlling monetary and fiscal policy, regulating business cycles, overseeing commercial and industrial activity, stimulating economic growth, influencing prices, managing debts, deficits and surpluses, administering tax systems, and especially spending public funds to boost the level of aggregate demand. According to Keynes, governments should operate surpluses in times of prosperity in order to have the funds necessary to spend on public works and other projects in times of recession and depression. Combined with the demand for more public services and much more governmental involvement in society, this led to a dramatic expansion in the size of governments in many parts of the world, as well as much more political and governmental interference in the affairs of nations.

This situation prevailed until the end of the twentieth century when conservative ideologies returned to dominate the world scene. By this time, the cold war had ended, communism had collapsed, and capitalism had triumphed.

Spurred on by the conviction that higher standards of living were possible for all people and countries through globalization, free trade, export-led development, and unrestricted corporate expansion, conservative policies, practices and governments showed up in more and more countries in the world. Inspired by the theories of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman and others, conservative governments and politicians put a great deal of stress on the private sector as opposed to the public sector, individualism, monetary policy, tax advantages for the rich, elimination of government debts and deficits, reductions in the size of governments, cuts in social programs, and a return to economic and political liberalism. Only in the early part of the twenty-first century, as the blush has come off the conservative rose as a result of difficult social, political, commercial and environmental problems, has there been a return to liberal ideologies and socialist sentiments in particular parts of the world.

In the main, this describes how the present system of politics came into existence, evolved over the last two centuries, and where matters stand today.

It is a system based on the conviction that wealth creation and “growing the economy” are the principal priorities of government, governance, and the political process. This is because wealth creation and growing the economy are seen as the keys to everything else: increases in the standard of living; generation of

consumption, investment and employment activity; improvements in the quality of life; and satisfaction of people's needs and wants in all areas of life. In order to do this, economics and economies are made the centrepiece of society and principal preoccupation of municipal, regional, national and international development. Regardless of whether political parties, politicians, and governments are left of centre, right of centre, or situated squarely in the middle, there is virtually unanimous agreement on this.

While this describes the present system of politics in the main, it does not explain why there are so many different political parties, ideas, opinions and beliefs. This has much more to do with "the distribution of wealth" than "the production of wealth" as indicated earlier. While there is virtually unanimous agreement that wealth creation and growing economies are the central objectives of the present system of politics, there is far less agreement on how wealth should be distributed among the various classes and interest groups in society.

Once this issue is raised, governments, politicians, world leaders, and citizens quickly subdivide into different political groups, factions and parties - liberals, conservatives, left wingers, right wingers, centralists, capitalists, communists, socialists, and the like.<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, conservatives, capitalists and right wingers subscribe to the theories espoused by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and others who contend that governments should play a minor role in society and interfere with the economy, the marketplace, and the distribution of income as little as possible. Liberals, socialists, and left wingers subscribe to the theories espoused by John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, welfare economists, and others who contend that governments and politicians should play a major role in society and be actively involved in the economy, the marketplace, and the distribution of income. Nevertheless, virtually everyone agrees that wealth creation and growing economies are the principal objectives of politics and the political process. On this, there is little or no debate.

## **ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM**

There is no doubt that the present system of politics has made numerous contributions to the quality of life and standards of living throughout the world. By making economics, economies, and wealth creation the centrepiece of politics and the political process, it has contributed substantially to the advances that have been realized in production, productivity and productive capacity, as well as the achievements that have been recorded in the arts, sciences, technology, education, recreation, health care, and other areas of life. The fact that many people in the world are unable to enjoy these benefits has much more to do with the distribution of wealth than the production of wealth.

As a result of these developments, and others, life is no longer “nasty, brutish and short” as Hobbes described it some three centuries ago. On the contrary, it is fulfilling and rewarding for numerous people throughout the world. While some lament the passing of bygone eras and earlier periods of history, few would exchange their present situation for bygone eras or earlier periods of history if it meant substantially shorter lives, significantly higher mortality rates, a great deal of poverty, pestilence and disease, and sixty to eighty hour work weeks. While this is what life and living are still like for countless people in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East, there is no doubt that life is a more satisfying affair for many people throughout the world.

Despite this, there are severe storm clouds gathering on the global horizon. They act as early warning signals that the present system of politics may not be capable of coming to grips with the problems people, countries, governments, politicians and world leaders are confronted with today, and may be confronted with more so in the future.

Clearly the present system of politics is not capable of coming to grips with the environmental crisis. This is because the system is predicated on ideological beliefs and economic, corporate and commercial values that are inimical to this. Moreover, it is not possible to incorporate the natural environment into the system after the fact, especially when it has been ignored, neglected, and taken for granted for two centuries.

This was not a problem when the present system of politics was created. Nor was it a problem when the present system was evolving. This is because the population of the world was much smaller than it is today, and it was always possible for countries with domestic resource deficiencies to draw on resources in other parts of the world. But it is an extremely serious problem today, and is destined to become an even more serious problem in the future. With the population of the world at six billion and growing rapidly in absolute if not relative terms, and with the carrying capacity of the earth severely limited and rapidly approaching, there are bound to be chronic shortages of renewable and non-renewable resources, many more environmental catastrophes, international resource wars, and a great deal of more violence, conflict and confrontation in the world if the environmental crisis is not dealt with effectively in the future.

We are beginning to get a taste of this. Escalating shortages of strategic natural resources - gas, oil, electricity, wood, water, and especially arable land - are playing havoc with people and countries in many parts of the world, as are the prices being charged for these resources. In conjunction with global warming and many other environmental difficulties, this is contributing to the frequency of forest fires, floods, hurricanes, droughts, pollution, and the spread of greenhouse

gases and toxic substances throughout the world. So pronounced have these problems become that many ecologists warn that the entire global eco-system could collapse if aggressive action is not taken to prevent it. It is as if Gaia - mother earth - has decided to fight back after decades, indeed centuries, of neglect. This, in itself, suggests that a new system of politics is needed to address these problems - a system that opens up a commanding place for the natural environment and the intimate connection people have with it at its very centre.

This problem is compounded by the highly materialistic way of life that results when economics, economies, and economic growth are made the centrepiece of politics, the political process, and life. Not only does this increase the demands people and countries are making on renewable and non-renewable resources, but also it has a devastating effect on the natural environment and other species. The more economies are grown, material wealth is created, and consumer demands and expectations are increased, the more pressure is exerted on the natural environment, the more damage is done to nature and other species, the more resources are used up and contaminated, the less is available for future generations, and the more ecological destruction takes place. This is not a viable scenario for the future. On the contrary, it is a prescription for disaster.

A highly materialistic way of life affects other aspects of life and living. In the modern world, this results in a much higher priority being placed on products, profits and the marketplace than on people and matters of human welfare and well-being. This has led to the crisis of maldevelopment or spiritual poverty in the midst of plenty in recent years, as well as the claim that development does not have a "human face." This augurs badly for the quest to realize "sustainable development" and a better quality of life in the future.

These are not the only problems the present system of politics appears incapable of coming to grips with. Income inequalities have reached epic proportions in the world today. Not only is half the world's population living on less than \$2 American a day, but also a recent World Bank report revealed that the average income of the twenty richest countries is thirty times greater than the average income of the twenty poorest countries, up from fifteen times in 1960.<sup>3</sup>

This is contributing to the explosive situation that exists throughout the world. In the "developing world" - Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and parts of the Middle East - there is hostility and resentment over centuries of exploitation, indifference, injustice and neglect. In the "developed world" - North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan - there are concerted attempts to protect income, wealth and resources, including gated communities, stepped-up border patrols, elaborate military installations, and sophisticated defence systems. This heightens a situation that is close to the breaking point. It also increases the

potential for violence, terrorism, racial unrest, and biological, nuclear and chemical warfare, since many people and countries are living without a great deal of hope for an improvement in their situation in the future.

It has always been claimed that the “trickle down effect” will eventually solve these problems. However, when a tiny fraction of the world’s population owns or controls the bulk of the world’s income and wealth, it is difficult to see how this will change as long as the present system of politics is in place. What appears more likely is that disparities in income, wealth, power and resources will continue, thereby making it difficult for poor people and poor countries to escape the endless cycle of poverty, disease, hunger and unemployment. This could result in even more violence, conflict and confrontation in the world - a chilling prospect in view of the high levels of these atrocities today.

This situation will be aggravated whenever the system of politics is dominated by rich and powerful classes and special interest groups. What started out with Adam Smith as a desire to increase wealth for the purpose of enhancing the well-being of all classes and making improvements in society has since become a desire to increase wealth for the purpose of creating more wealth for rich and powerful classes and special interest groups. This explains why there is much more interest in production than distribution, as well as the desire to keep economies and markets as free as possible from political interference and governmental constraint.

A concomitant feature of this is that participation in the political process has become an extremely expensive business in most parts of the world. Not only are enormous sums of money required to enter politics, but also enormous sums are required to stay in politics. Politics has become “a rich man’s game” as never before, with little or no opportunity for people with insufficient means to enter politics, get elected, or craft the changes in political processes and procedures that are required to assume public office. This serves to reinforce the control and domination of the system by the rich and powerful classes and special interest groups, as well as the financial and non-financial rewards that derive from this.

But the most serious problem of all may be the inability of the present system of politics to deal objectively and equitably with all classes and sectors of society and society as a whole. It is not difficult to determine the reason for this. It is impossible for governments, politicians, and world leaders to get deeply immersed in the economic sector of society without this impairing their ability to act impartially, fairly, and in the public interest.

While governments, politicians and world leaders have become immersed in the economic sector of society with the best of intentions, this is no longer

possible to justify. Not only does it make it impossible for governments and politicians to play a *political* role in society, but also the tail is forever wagging the dog. The most obvious example of this is corporations, developers and commercial elites who have become so powerful and pervasive in the modern era that they are often able to dictate what is in the best interests of citizens, societies and countries. This makes it possible for them to subordinate political, governmental, societal and human interests to their will.

This has caused an erosion in political power and governmental credibility in many parts of the world in recent years, not to mention the break down of borders and boundaries, the creation of “industrial trade zones” that are exempt from the rule of law, loss of interest in government and politics on the parts of citizens, community groups and young people, a great deal of suspicion, mistrust, patronage and corruption, and the inability of governments and politicians to act in the best interests of their constituents and constituencies.

Governments, politicians, and world leaders will have to extricate themselves from this situation if they are to govern effectively in the future, as well as deal fairly and impartially with an incredible array of local, regional, national and international problems. Many of these problems - such as glaring inequalities in income and wealth, a great deal of poverty, hunger, homelessness and unemployment, the spread of infectious diseases, lack of viable social, recreational and health care programs, escalating violence, terrorism and racism, gridlock, lack of suitable accommodation and ecological disasters - do not receive the attention and priority they deserve in the political process because they are deemed to stand outside economics and the economic realm.

These problems are aggravated by the fact that many governments are in an extremely precarious financial position today. In the process of getting deeply immersed in the economic sector of society and expending huge sums to boost the level of aggregate demand, they have rung up large debts and deficits. They have failed to heed Keynes’ sage advice that surpluses should be created in good times in order to have the funds necessary to expend on public works and other programs in bad times. As a result, many governments have been compelled to raise taxes and cut badly-needed social, educational and environmental programs when they are needed the most. This further hampers their ability to act objectively, impartially, and in the public interest.

As long as this situation exists, the environmental crisis will not be solved, excesses, imbalances and deficiencies will be experienced in the world system and people’s lives that are impossible to prevent, gaps in income, wealth, resources and power will widen, and consumer demands and expectations will be created

that are beyond the potential of the natural environment and the carrying capacity of the earth to fulfill.

It follows from this that a “new system of politics” is needed to deal with these problems. The old adage - look after the economy and everything else will look after itself - is no longer sufficient. For everything is not looking after itself, nor will it ever look after itself as long as everything is reduced to economics and wealth creation and economies are made the centrepiece of society and principal preoccupation of the political process.

Since the clues that are needed to fashion this new system lie in a careful reading of the global situation and the dynamic changes that are going on in the world today, it is to this situation that attention can now be directed.

## **THE NEW GLOBAL REALITY**

It is commonplace to say that a new reality is taking hold in the world. It is a reality that is evident in many developments throughout the world: the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the terrorists attacks on the United States and Spain; the conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world; globalization; commercialization; and mind-boggling changes in technology, communications, demographics, the arts, the sciences, and many other areas of life.

As a result of these developments, and many others, there is a rapidly-emerging awareness throughout the world that the world is comprised not only of economies, but more fundamentally, of cultures. These cultures are “dynamic and organic wholes” or “total ways of life” that are composed of many elements - social, environmental, economic, political, educational, technological, artistic, recreational, religious, spiritual, and the like. This is the new global reality and it would be foolish to deny it. As the Chinese proverb says, “the beginning of wisdom lies in calling things by their right names.”

While economics and economies constitute a very essential component of this new global reality because they are concerned with people’s material needs and the ever-recurrent problem of survival, they are part and parcel of a broader, deeper, and more all-encompassing process. This process is cultural because it is concerned with people’s needs *in all areas of life*, and therefore with the entire way people visualize and interpret the world, organize themselves, conduct their affairs, elevate and embellish life, and position themselves in the world.

*This has always been the global reality in a very fundamental sense.* It has merely been obscured by two centuries of preoccupation with economics, economies, economic growth, economic reductionism, and the economic

interpretation of history. Whenever and wherever people come together in historical and geographical association for the purpose of living together in the world and working out their association with the world, there culture and cultures are to be found. Culture and cultures in this sense are the real foundations of human existence and the engines that drive the train.

Acceptance of this fact has many advantages. In the first place, it focuses attention on all the different cultures of the world. Since these cultures are predicated on worldviews, values, values systems, and ways of life that vary greatly from one culture to another and one part of the world to another, this underscores the need to deal effectively with all the diverse cultures in the world if peace and harmony are to be achieved in the future. For cultures differ not only in their details and parts. They also differ - *and differ fundamentally* - as wholes or total ways of life. This has become painfully apparent as a result of the many differences separating Islamic and non-Islamic cultures, eastern and western cultures, northern and southern cultures, and all the other cultures in the world. Without a much better understanding of African, Asian, Latin American, Caribbean, North American, European, and Middle Eastern cultures - and particularly the worldviews, values and value systems that underlie them and the differences that exist between them - people and countries in all parts of the world will be in for a rocky ride in the future.

Secondly, it shines the spotlight on the complex interrelationships that exist between the component parts of cultures. Since these parts are constantly interacting with one another and impacting on one another, it is not possible to posit causal and definitive relationships between them. Nor is it possible to reduce them all to economics, as proponents of the economic interpretation of history contend. As the distinguished cultural historian, Karl Weintraub put it, "In this delicately fashioned network (of cultures) the arts may have their ties to religion and economic values, morality may affect the constitutional arrangements and in turn be affected by political realities, a mood reflected in literature may also come to the fore in a social custom, and a scientific insight may work back upon a religion belief."<sup>4</sup> Is this not a much more accurate and authentic interpretation of what really goes on in cultures, societies, countries, and civilizations?

Seen from this perspective, the world is made up of vast and complex "cultural systems" that are comprised of many different elements, all of which are constantly changing, evolving and interacting as changes take place in their parts. This is the real reality that exists in the world. While some of these changes can be foreseen and predicated in advance, many occur without a great deal of warning and affect whole cultural systems. A good example of this are the changes that are going on in gender and marital relations and sexual preferences throughout the world. Changes in relations between men and women, same sex marriages, and

gay and lesbian relationships are having a profound effect on entire cultural systems and people and countries in all parts of the world.

Nor is this all. Changes can erupt suddenly in cultural systems which have a devastating effect on the systems as wholes. A good example of this is HIV/AIDS, SARS, mad cow disease, and other infectious diseases. They have erupted in different parts of the world and had crippling effects on health care and medical systems, education, economies, recreation, employment, tourism, and virtually everything else. So have power blackouts and energy shortages. They are capable of erupting at any time and bringing entire cultural systems to a sudden halt.

The difficulty here - as governments, politicians and world leaders know only too well - is that these problems require huge sums to fix - if they can be fixed at all - without any commensurate returns. When electrical systems fail and power outages occur, recovery costs are substantial without any corresponding benefits. When people are infected in substantial numbers and millions of animals are slaughtered, the financial costs are staggering without any accompanying advantages. Clearly it will not be possible to deal with problems like this, and others, without recognizing that vast and complex cultural systems exist in the world where everything is connected to everything else and dependent on everything else. These systems will have to be skillfully managed and carefully directed if they are to function effectively in the future. This will require both capable administrators and far-sighted politicians and diplomats.

And this is the point. Governments, politicians, and world leaders are now compelled to deal with abrupt, erratic, and often unpredictable changes in cultural systems that have devastating and costly effects on the systems as wholes. It is no longer a case of developing and managing local, regional, and national economies and then assuming this will have a beneficial effect on everything else. Rather, it is a case of developing and managing complex cultural systems and ensuring that they are effectively monitored, efficiently administered, and wisely guided. In order to do this, governments, politicians and world leaders will have to know a great deal more about how cultural systems function, how they interact with one another, and how changes that occur in their various parts impact on the systems as wholes. *This will demand a cultural rather than an economic approach to government, governance, politics, and the political process.* Without this, people and countries in all parts of the world will pay a severe price in the future.

There are other advantages to be derived from recognizing that the world is comprised of many different cultures and complex cultural systems that should be taken into account.

One of the most important of these is recognizing the crucial relationship that exists between people and the natural environment. It is a relationship that lies at the heart of all cultures and cultural systems.

It is impossible to recognize this without opening up a commanding place for the natural environment, nature and other species at the core of cultures and cultural systems. This is bound to yield numerous benefits in terms of the way human beings interact with the natural environment, nature and other species in the future, including preservation and protection of the natural environment at every opportunity, conservation of nature's precious resource legacy, reductions in the demands and expectations human beings are making on the natural environment, and especially developing worldviews, values, value systems, lifestyles, and ways of life that treat the natural environment, nature and other species with respect and appreciation. For the evidence is overwhelming and conclusive. Cultures that fail to take the natural environment and nature's scarce resource legacy fully and forcefully into account in all developmental planning and decision-making run the risk of overextending themselves and collapsing entirely.

There is one final advantage to be derived from recognizing the reality of cultures and complex cultural systems. It is the attention that is given to people and matters of human welfare and well-being. Since cultures are concerned with human needs and the way human needs are fulfilled in fact, a high priority is placed on people and the circumstances governing their lives. This is imperative if problems as debilitating as poverty, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, safety, security, and inequitable distributions of income and resources are to be dealt with effectively. These problems will never be addressed as long as material and monetary wealth, growing economies, and products and profits are given priority over people and matters of human welfare and well-being.

## **A CULTURE-BASED SYSTEM OF POLITICS**

It follows from this that culture and cultures have a crucial role to play in the new system of politics that is so badly needed for the future. Not only is this consistent with the newly-emerging global reality and the direction the world is headed in at present, but also it is consistent with the need to make culture and cultures mainstream rather than marginal activities in the holistic sense in which the terms are employed here.

In order to do this, it is necessary to develop culture and cultures in breadth and depth, as well as situate culture and cultures effectively in the natural, historical and global environment.

Developing culture in breadth and depth means ensuring that all people and classes have access to opportunities and options, and are able to participate actively and fully in all aspects and dimensions of cultural life. This is imperative since every person and class has a great deal to contribute to culture, as well as a great deal to receive in return. But it also means ensuring that a high priority is placed on those ideals that people and countries in all parts of the world have valued most highly despite major differences in worldviews, values, value systems and beliefs: the quest for knowledge, wisdom, beauty and truth; the importance of creativity and excellence; the need for equality, diversity, identity and unity; preservation of the cultural heritage; and caring, sharing, compassion and cooperation. Interestingly, many of these ideals - and particularly creativity, diversity, caring, sharing and cooperation - are seen as the keys to municipal, regional and national development and global well-being in the future.

It is impossible to achieve these ideals without placing a great deal of emphasis on the arts, humanities, education, learning, spirituality, ethics, and all those things that have a close historical and contemporary connection with culture. While these activities have no monopoly on culture since culture is the concern of all people, these activities tend to put these ideals ahead of other ideals. In so doing, they communicate effectively across geographical and political boundaries and racial and linguistic divides in profound, moving and very human ways, revealing most clearly what cultures are all about, how they have evolved in space and time, and what they hold most dear to themselves. Viewed from this perspective, every country, culture and civilization in the world possesses a rich and diversified array of artistic, educational, social, humanistic and spiritual amenities that needs to be much better known and utilized throughout the world. It is this fact that makes it imperative to build up relations in these areas to the point where a reasonable degree of parity and equality is achieved with commercial, industrial, financial and technological relations.

What is true for culture is also true for cultures. Developing cultures in breadth and depth means developing all activities in society and not just certain activities. While it is essential to develop commercial, industrial, financial and technological activities, it is equally essential to develop artistic, social, recreation, educational and spiritual activities if fulfillment and happiness are to be achieved in life. It should be made clear here that it is not a case of developing cultures *or* economies. Rather it is a case of developing cultures *and* economics, but developing them in such a way that economies are always properly positioned in cultures. We need strong economies to create the material and monetary resources that is required to make improvements in living standards and the physical circumstances of people's lives, as well as to yield the consumption, investment and employment activities that are needed to make quantitative improvements in life. But we need economies that are properly situated in cultures - *and*

*constrained and enriched by cultural values and ideals* - if economies are to be pointed in the right direction in the future and serve human goals and objectives and not just commercial, financial and technological goals and objectives. This is what it will take to achieve development with a human face, as well as put human welfare and well-being ahead of products, profits, and the marketplace.

Developing cultures in breadth and depth also requires achieving balance and harmony between the component parts of cultures. This ensures that cultures are cohesive, coherent and civilized rather than disparate, disorganized and disconnected. The Dutch cultural historian, Johan Huizinga, had something extremely valuable to say in this regard. Following his intensive investigations of numerous cultures throughout the world, he said “the realities of economic life, of power, of technology, of everything conducive to man’s material well-being, must be balanced by strongly developed spiritual, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic values.”<sup>5</sup> Achieving this would go a long way towards reducing the demands human beings are making on the natural environment and scarce renewable and non-renewable resources since a much better balance would be realized between people’s material and non-material needs and quantitative and qualitative requirements.

As challenging as it is to develop culture and cultures in breadth and depth, it is even more challenging to position culture and cultures effectively in the natural, historical and global environment. This will require a whole series of developments, including learning to walk lightly on the land, reducing the ecological footprint people and countries are making on the natural environment, coming to grips with the cultural baggage people pass on from generation to generation and century to century, and creating many more bonds, links and connections between the diverse peoples, countries, cultures and civilizations of the world. This will not be possible without a dramatic increase in international relations in the arts, sciences, education and the humanities, as well as many more opportunities for intercultural dialogue, communication, cooperation, education and exchange. These are the real keys to solidarity, friendship and understanding in the future.

Mahatma Gandhi had wise counsel in this regard. He said, “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. *But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.*”<sup>6</sup>

It is universal sharing of culture and cultures and refusal to be blown off one’s feet by any culture - particularly one’s own culture - that counteracts racism, nationalism, imperialism, and xenophobia in the world. It also reduces the risks and dangers that accompany making culture and cultures mainstream rather than

marginal activities. In order to minimize these risks and dangers, many more safeguards and precautions will have to be created to ensure that culture and cultures are used for constructive rather than destructive purposes. Included among these safeguards and precautions are: developing a strong public sector to counterbalance the private sector; ensuring that too much political, corporate, commercial, and military power is not concentrated in too few hands; establishing democratic and benevolent forms of government and governance; establishing cultural agencies at arm's length from government and the political process; and democratizing and decentralizing public and private institutions and decision-making process.

If goals and objectives as worthy as these are to be realized, governments will have to put themselves in a much stronger financial position than they are in today. This will not be easy to achieve. As indicated earlier, many governments have become so deeply enmeshed in the economic affairs of nations that they are saddled with oppressive debts and deficits. This makes it impossible for them to play a *political* role in society, as well as function in a manner consistent with the public interest. It also makes it impossible for them to reduce their dependency on corporations, developers, and commercial interests. Surely the last thing governments need when they are attempting to come to grips with all the complex and debilitating problems people and countries are confronted with today is to be dependent on a single sector of society and behold to a particular interest group.

Governments will have to use all the policy tools and techniques at their disposal if they are to put themselves in a stronger financial position. This is especially important in the case of legislation, regulation, consolidation and taxation. Legislation and regulation are necessary to exercise full control and authority over corporations, developers and commercial interests, as well as to return the political process to citizens, community groups, and the public realm. Consolidation and taxation are necessary to eliminate corruption, patronage, duplication and waste, restore the financial health and fiscal viability of governments, and strengthen the capacity of governments to address pressing societal issues and concerns.

While care must be taken not to dampen economic activity or curtail investment, commercial, and entrepreneurial enthusiasm, a great deal could be achieved through *progressive taxation measures* which impose heavier tax burdens on the rich and privileged classes of society and corporate, financial and commercial elites. This would enable governments to reduce their debts and deficits and play a powerful political role in society. *We are not talking about politics of the "left," "right," or "centre" here. Rather, we are talking about the creation of a new system of politics - a system that makes it possible for*

*governments, politicians and world leaders to achieve balance and harmony between all sectors of society, deal equitably with all citizens and community groups, achieve sustainable development, assert the importance of human welfare and environmental well-being in political policies and decision-making processes, and reduce the enormous disparities that exist in income, wealth and resources throughout the world.*

Many practical developments are needed to achieve this. One is conducting an all-out assault on human needs by increasing foreign aid and developmental assistance. Another is decreasing the debt loads of African, Asian, Latin American and Caribbean countries. Still another is improving the terms of trade and eliminating high tariffs and agricultural subsidies in western countries. And still another is making it possible for poor people and poor classes to access the credit, capital, technological acumen, and entrepreneurial and educational expertise they need to take control of their destinies and the lives.

Taking a *cultural* approach to government, governments, politics and the political process is imperative for this. When culture is visualized and dealt with in holistic terms as it is in more and more institutions and countries throughout the world, the focus is on developing all activities, classes and sectors of society, as well as achieving synergistic and sustainable relationships between them. Viewed from this perspective, there is an intimate bond between culture and politics, since both are concerned with the whole, the parts of the whole, and the need to achieve balanced and harmonious relationships between the parts and the whole. If this is not attended to by governments, politicians and world leaders, it will not be attended to at all, since governments, politicians and world leaders are the one group in society that possess the mandate, responsibility, authority and overview to deal with all activities, classes, and sectors of society equally, systematically, and impartially. All other groups in society - and there are many - deal with specific parts of the whole, and are therefore far less concerned with the need to achieve vital, viable, and sustainable relationships between the parts and the whole.

This is what government, governance, politics and the political process are all about in the final analysis. They are about ensuring that all activities, classes and sectors of society are properly positioned in the whole, function effectively in the whole, and are situated effectively in the natural, historical and global environment. This projects governments, politicians and world leaders into a quintessential role in society because they are responsible for overseeing, administering and orchestrating complex cultures and dynamic cultural systems that are composed of numerous elements that are constantly impacting on one another and interacting with one another.

What is slowly but surely emerging here is a new framework for governmental and political decision-making. It is a framework that is predicated on taking a comprehensive, objective and equitable approach to governmental and political decision-making rather than a partial and partisan approach. This is essential if sustainable development, human welfare, environmental well-being, and global harmony are to be achieved in the future.

Developing political and governmental structures that are open, responsive, egalitarian and inclusive - rather than closed, unresponsive, biased and exclusive - is the key to this. The aim should always be to evolve political policies and practices that involve all people, institutions, classes and sectors in the process, improve the lot of all citizens and community groups, and make it possible for people to live creative, constructive and fulfilling lives. It is an enormous responsibility, but one which must be executed effectively by governments, politicians and world leaders if people and countries in all parts of the world are to live in peace and harmony rather than conflict and confrontation and humanity is to go fruitfully into the future.

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1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Edited by G. H. Von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, Translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3e.

2. I would like to thank Walter Pitman, former Member of Parliament in the Government of Canada and Member of the Provincial Parliament in the Government of Ontario for his valuable contributions to this paper.

3. David Crane, "Chrétien and G8 leaders ignore real issues," *The Toronto Star*, Saturday, July 22, 2000, p. E 2.

4. Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture: Voltaire, Guizot, Burckhardt, Lamprecht, Huizina, Ortega y Gasset* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 2 (insert mine).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

6. The World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity* (Paris: The World Commission on Culture and Development and Egoprism, 1995), p. 73.

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