

RIP-OFF

Supermarkets fleece shoppers

Supermarkets and chain stores in the UK are raking in huge profits while charging higher prices than consumers pay in other EC countries or the US.

Net profits for the large supermarkets in the UK are roughly three times higher than in France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Supermarkets use their size to buy goods more cheaply from food producers and then sign them up to exclusive contracts. This drives retail competitors out of business (as in the corner shops) or forces them into mergers (remember Lipton, Fine Fare, William Low).

From 1984 to 1994 the number of food shops in Britain declined by over 20% and the top five retailers increased their share of total sales by 50%.

Over the same period gross profit

BY KATE McCABE

margins in food retailing increased by a fifth, and for the giants with 100 or more outlets, they increased by one third.

The wave of mergers and acquisitions still continues. Somerfields (Food Giant and Somerfield) this year bought up Kwik Save, reducing competition at the discount end of the food business in the UK to zero.

In other European countries a similar concentration of power in the hands of a few retail giants has taken place, but this has not led to price-hikes as in the UK because there are still some price controls. And in both France and Germany workers earn more than in supermarkets in the UK.

The higher prices paid in Britain are not

invested in better quality food – confidence in food in the UK is lower than anywhere in Europe. Nor are they spent on improving the wages and conditions of supermarket workers.

Instead they go on big profits; fat cat salaries for executives; and setting up new in-store business, like banking and pensions, to try to grab an even bigger share of consumer spending.

The power of the supermarkets and chain stores is stressed in a recent Office of Fair Trading report. It says the major chains now have a “gatekeeper role”, controlling access to consumers. In other words, the supermarket giants control the food market at both ends – and at both ends use their power to increase their profits. Consumers and producers come a poor second.

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Inside this issue: A special 5-page in-depth report on the economic crisis and the state of the planet

At the court of Emperor Blair

New Labour's conference showed that Tony Blair's party exists only for the purposes of endorsing, and being endorsed by, corporate business. The supermarket chain Somerfields sponsored the delegates' badges, and multi-national companies spent fortunes running exhibitions of their wares, and wining and dining ministers.

No real discussion or debate was allowed, as speakers queued up to praise "our leader", Blair, who more and more acts like a monarch with the party as his court. Politics was actually missing altogether, and the conference could have been organised by housing associations, for example, or the Institute of Directors.

This was a glimpse of the nightmare future in a Blair

Britain, if New Labour has its way. All dissent is eliminated and what were distinct parts of the system become one and the same.

Thus New Labour becomes part of the state, instead of a party. In turn, the state is the same as the New Labour government. And the interests of big business are the same as those of the government. The role of New Labour, therefore, is to "facilitate", to make sure that the parent company – Britain PLC – is what we are all supposed to work for.

This is the politics of totalitarianism by another name – the "Third Way". There is an alternative to this reactionary "project". We urge you to join the **Movement for a Socialist Future** and help us make it a reality.

RIP-OFF

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The report's author, Professor Paul Dobson, of Loughborough University, said: "Customers may feel they are being ripped off by supermarkets since when they go abroad they observe much lower prices.

"It appears there is generally an absence of intense price competition on the high streets and the result is higher profits for the retailers but higher prices for the customer."

To find out whose side the Blair government is on in this consumer war, you only have to look at his friends. He appointed Tesco boss Terry Leahy (annual salary £798,000) to a job on – of all things – the competitiveness task force!

Lord Sainsbury, with a fortune estimated at £2.5bn, is now a full-time Labour peer, with a Blair appointment in the Department of Trade & Industry.

Somerfield sponsored the delegates' badges at the Labour Party conference, for a reported £20,000. Given the wages Somerfield pay, some delegates refused to wear their logo and used an alternative badge issued by the GMB Union. A Labour Party spokesperson dismissed their protest contemptuously, saying "It's like little children at school wearing their ties back to front."

Printer pulps eco-mag in fear of corporate giant

The entire September issue of *The Ecologist* magazine was pulped by its printer when it attempted to publish a special issue on genetically-modified (GM) food focusing on the activities of the bio-technology and agrichemical corporation, Monsanto.

The issue began with an open letter to Monsanto, casting doubts on the company's claim in a recent advertising campaign that it wants a free and open debate about GM.

The magazine claimed that Monsanto's increasing monopoly position is undermining bio-diversity, because locally-produced seed is being replaced by the GM patent substitutes.

Over the past three years, Monsanto has spent billions to consolidate its market position, buying up key companies associated with GM crops:

- Delta & Pine Land (price \$4bn) – invented terminator technology, which genetically alters seeds so they will not germinate if replanted.
- Roundup – the world's best-selling herbicide and herbicide pre-treated seed
- Holden's Foundation Seeds (price over \$1bn) – the biggest US seed corn producer

- Clagene – the company which developed genetically-engineered tomatoes, oilseed rape, cotton and strawberries
- Agracetus – claims patents for all GM manipulation of soya, cotton and other crops.
- Dekalb Genetics Corp (price \$1.4bn) – a further 45% of the US seed-corn market,
- Cargills (price \$1.4bn) – a grain trader and food processing company
- Unilever crop-breeding division (price £320m) – with patents in hybrid wheat

In the three years since it began its assault on the market, Monsanto's share price has soared from \$11.50 to \$54 (at time of going to press).

Monsanto says it knew nothing about the printer's decision to pulp the magazine, but the company recently obtained an injunction against the "Genetic Snowball" movement, to ban its campaign of pulling up plants in Monsanto's experimental GM fields in the UK.

By the end of this year, Monsanto estimates that there will be 38 million acres of land on the planet growing their genetically-modified crops. In 1995 the figure was – zero!

GET YOUR COPY OF THE PROGRAMME AND JOIN THE MOVEMENT

The Movement for a Socialist Future was launched on October 1 and brings together all those who support the plan to launch a new Party in 1999 to take away the power and privileges of the minority who control our lives.

Who can join the Movement? Anyone who supports its draft policies, which are aimed at securing mass democratic ownership and control of economic, social, cultural and political life.

The founding document says: "We have reached a turning point in global history which brings with it grave dangers for humanity as well as great opportunities to take control of our lives and create a new future for society."

It describes the global economic crisis and the collapse of the "free market economy", and demonstrates how production could be reorganised for need and not profit.

Members of the Movement will have the chance to take part directly in the founding of the new Party next year. In the meantime, they meet locally and elect committees to take charge of building up support for the Movement in their area.

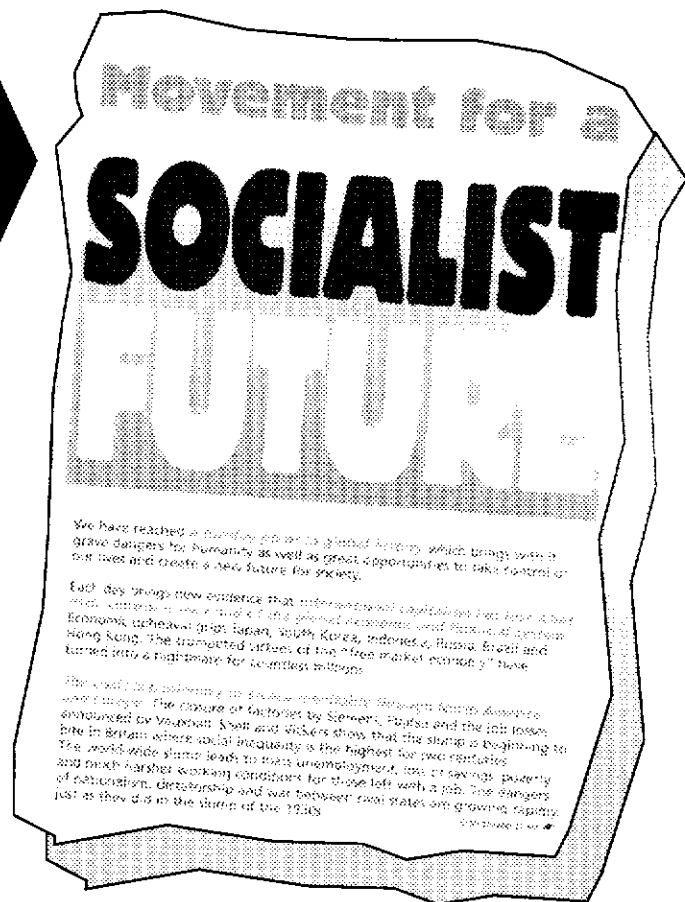
Each area sends a representative to a national Steering Committee, which has overall responsibility for the project. The Steering Committee will help you set up local branches.

A monthly subscription based on what members can afford goes towards financing the campaign for a new Party, which already has a magazine, *Socialist Future*.

Members of the Movement have equal rights in discussing what kind of party should be launched, its aims, constitution and programme.

A national conference of the Movement for a Socialist Future will take place in 1999 to make the final decisions about the creation of the new Party.

The Movement will also seek allies in other countries to form



an international organisation to campaign for global socialist change.

Capitalism deliberately fosters doubts about the possibility of social change, with its emphasis on the individual and the permanence of the system. The Movement challenges this scepticism by developing its own ideas and theories. By encouraging independent ideas and policies, it will win the support of the vast majority to take power into their own hands.

Write today to: Movement for a Socialist Future, PO Box 942, London SW1V 2AR or e-mail msf@sfuture.demon.co.uk

Government under attack on low pay at Labour's Blackpool conference

The government came under pressure at the Labour conference in Blackpool over the national minimum wage and public sector pay.

Unison general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe told Chancellor Gordon Brown it was time for immediate public sector pay rises. Taking the conference floor after Brown's keynote speech on the economy, Bickerstaffe said: "Don't just give us a vision of the promised land, give us a place in it."

He argued against staged pay rises for public sector workers. If the economy is strong enough to allow the government to pay off £20bn of the national debt and inject £40bn into public services, he

asked, then why was it necessary for a Labour government to claw back from nurses, midwives and other poorly-paid workers the pay rises awarded to them?

He begged the chancellor: "Can I plead for change. Let's try a new, fairer way for public sector pay, which is already so far behind the private sector and the huge City and boardroom hikes. Not jam yesterday, but a little bit of jam today for those who will look after you tomorrow."

At a fringe meeting, Bharti Patel, director of the Low Pay Unit, said the proposed minimum wage would deny six million employees the right to decent pay. The minimum wage of £3.60 an hour is too low to have any decisive impact on

poverty, discrimination and inequality, he said: "While £3.60 an hour will tackle the worst cases of exploitation – and the Low Pay Unit has hundreds of such cases – it will do nothing for the increasing numbers of people paid below a decent living wage."

"We will pay a heavy price in the longer term for crushing the hopes of millions of people on low pay and pushing them into poorly-paid jobs. We urge the government to increase the minimum rate to at least £4.61 an hour."

Age Concern Director Sally Greengross challenged the government to show how pensioners will achieve a decent life under its plan to reduce state pensions and rely on the private sector.

A clear sign of the growing disarray resulting from the global financial crisis was shown by the failure of the world economic summit in Washington in early October.

The leaders of the major capitalist countries had gathered to discuss ways to shore up the crumbling financial markets.

Their attempts followed the collapse of the US-based Long Term Capital Management fund. LTCM made vast fortunes by gambling on small movements in interest rates.

Russia was a gamble too far and LTCM was left unable to meet "commitments" of \$200 billion. It was "rescued" by a group of banks, including Barclays, which itself lost over £200 million in the rouble collapse.

While Clinton and Blair have been forced to recognise the threat of world slump after years of denial they continue to seek solutions in better financial management. But LTCM's problem is both a consequence and cause of a deeper, more fundamental crisis.

Solutions offered, including a new gold standard, are many and varied but all focus on repairing the disintegrating patchwork of financial institutions and the rules that they follow.

These are centred on the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and are guided by unquestioned belief in the tenets of capitalist production. What none can accept is that Humpty has fallen, and the pieces can not be put back together again.

The global crisis is neither accident, nor mismanagement, but an essential part of capitalism's development and decline.

Competition between capitalist producers in the marketplace obliges them

"The global financial system responsible for our remarkable prosperity is coming apart at the seams."

Billionaire financier George Soros

All the king's horses and all the king's men...

Robert Knight assesses the crisis in the world financial system



Broken-hearted traders watch the markets tumble

continuously to seek to reduce the price of commodities by attempts to reduce the price of labour, and by increasing the productivity of labour through investment in new machinery and methods of production.

This compulsion to invest drives technological revolution, and the growing concentration and centralisation of capital through mergers and take-overs.

As the quantity of machinery, buildings and productive land increases, the number of workers required to maintain production levels declines relatively.

Since the labour-power of workers is the source of all

value, including profit, so the rate of profit generated from the total cost of production must tend to decline.

In order to stay in the business of generating profit, capitalist enterprises are continuously driven to "go for growth", making even greater investments and increasing productive capacity.

The volume of commodities grows beyond the capacity of the market to purchase them, and thus capitalist producers get deeper and deeper into difficulties which erupt in the form of crises.

As the rate of profit from production in "the real economy" declines, it

becomes less and less attractive to invest further in fixed capital. So the profit generated is diverted into "fictitious" capital – an ever-increasing variety of markets, including stocks, bonds, commodity futures and a myriad of hedge funds and "derivatives".

All these bear less and less relation to real value. And the less relation they have to value generated in the real economy, the more they become susceptible to crisis.

LTCM attracted vast sums of fictitious capital from amongst the world's biggest banks. Like the IMF and many of the major financial institutions it employed the cream of the world's mathematicians to invent new ways of spinning golden clouds from thin air.

The financial and economic crisis are, therefore, in essence one and the same thing. They come as part and parcel of the laws of capitalism. That is why "stability" cannot be restored through new institutions to replace the IMF and World Bank.

A billion people out of work

The International Labour Office is forecasting a massive increase in unemployment as a result of the world economic slump. World unemployment has never been higher and will grow by millions more before the end of the year in the wake of the financial crisis in Asia and other parts of the world.

"The global employment situation is grim, and getting grimmer," said Michel Hansenne, the ILO's director-general, as the organisation's World Employment Report was published.

The report's findings include:

- Some one billion workers – one third of the world's labour force – remain unemployed or underemployed.
- Of the one billion total, some 150 workers are actually unemployed, or seeking or available for work.
- Of these 150 million, 10 million unemployed have been generated this year due to the financial crisis in Asia alone.
- In addition, 25% to 30% of the world's workers – or between 750 million and 950 million people – are underemployed – either working substantially less than full-time, but wanting to work longer, or earning less than a living wage.
- The ILO estimates that some 60 million young people, between the ages of 15 and 24, are in search of work but cannot find it.

The report contrasts sharply with the last analysis, published in 1996, which forecast a global economic revival and cuts in unemployment and underemployment world-wide.

Central & Eastern Europe

In the **Russian Federation**, rising economic turmoil has been accompanied by a fall in the value of wages to 60% of their 1989 level. Prices of foreign goods have tripled since the collapse of the rouble. Unemployment is 10.4% in **Poland**, 13% in **Bulgaria** and 17.6% in

Special Report THE STATE OF THE PLANET



Striking Russian workers protest in the Duma

Croatia. Despite the benefits enjoyed by a tiny minority, says the ILO, most people in this region continue to suffer dramatic and painful declines in living standards.

Developed countries

In the **European Union**, more than 18 million workers are unemployed this year, says the ILO. This does not take into account the number of "discouraged" workers who have given up hope of finding work, and involuntary part-time workers. In **Japan**, unemployment is at a post-war high, with few social benefits for those without work.

South East Asia

The report says that three decades of sustained growth had no parallel in recent economic history, but the situation in the region has deteriorated dramatically in the last year.

In **Indonesia**, steep rises in unemployment and underemployment are accompanied by food shortages. The ILO warns that the purchasing power of wages could fall by more than 15% and unemployment treble to 12%.

In **Thailand**, the 2 million jobless will impact on rural areas, where the elderly rely on remittances from working family members in Bangkok. In **South Korea**, unemployment has risen sharply to 7%. It is also devastating **Hong Kong**. In **China**, it is estimated that 3.5 million workers will be laid off this year.

Latin America

The ILO says that the region faces a flight of international capital. In **Argentina**, unemployment is already around 15%. "Unable to work in formal markets, where productivity is high and wages relatively good, many workers have to engage in a number of activities that sometimes just allow them to survive," the report says.

Young people

The ILO estimates that 60 million young people around the world between the ages of 15 and 24 are in search of work, with youth unemployment running at 20% in many advanced economies. "Low growth has worsened the situation in Western Europe, and economic contraction and restructuring has severely limited access to new jobs in Eastern Europe," the report says. In developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, urban unemployment rates for young people often reach over 30%.

The report shows how the demand for skilled labour has risen significantly as a result of globalisation and changes in technology and the organisation of work. "Yet these same global forces seem to be reducing opportunities and incentives for training for many workers by undermining long-term employment relationships and excluding low-skilled workers from employment."

The unequal planet

A new United Nations report shows the growing gap between rich and poor

by Paul Feldman



World consumption, expressed in public and private expenditure, has doubled since 1975 and is six times higher than 1950. Yet, the same period has seen a growing inequality both between richer and poorer countries, as well as within the developed capitalist nations, according to a major report by the United Nations

While the Human Development Report 1998 offers little in the way of solutions, except to plead with the big economies to work in a different way, it demonstrates clearly the crisis facing humanity.

The report was written before the full impact of the world economic and financial crisis was assessed, but the trends it describes in some detail are significant enough.

The UN says the “dynamics of the consumption-poverty-inequality-environment nexus” are accelerating. “Today’s consumption is undermining the environmental resource base. It is exacerbating inequalities.”

Unless priority is shifted from consumption for “conspicuous display to meeting basic needs”, the problems of humanity can only worsen.

The report finds that:

- The average African household today consumes 20% less than it did in 25 years ago.
- The poorest 20% of the world’s people have been left out of the consumption

explosion. Over a billion people are deprived of basic needs.

- Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, nearly three-fifths lack basic sanitation; almost a third have no access to clean water, a fifth no access to modern health services.
- World-wide, 2 billion people are anaemic, including 55 million in industrial countries.

Inequalities in consumption are described as “stark”. Globally, the 20% of the world’s people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption spending – the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%.

More specifically, the richest fifth:

- Consume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%.
- Consume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%.
- Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth 1.5%.
- Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth 1.1%.
- Own 87% of the world’s vehicles, the poorest fifth less than 1%.

The UN compiles a human poverty index which covers factors ranging from income, to access to fax machines. Its new index shows that some 7–17% of the population in industrial countries is poor.

These levels of deprivation have little to do with the average income of the country. Sweden has the least poverty (7%),

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though ranked only 13th in average income.

The United States, with the highest average income, has the highest population experiencing severe poverty. Countries with similar per capita incomes also have very different levels of poverty.

The Netherlands and Britain, for example, have index values of 8% and 15%, despite similar income levels.

What the report confirms is that under-consumption and human deprivation are not just the lot of poor people in the developing world.

More than 100 million people in rich nations suffer a similar fate. Nearly 200 million people are not expected to survive to the age of 60. More than 100 million are homeless. And at least 37 million are without jobs.

The environment

Growth in consumption in the past 50

years is putting tremendous strain on the environment, the report insists.

- The burning of fossil fuels has risen nearly fivefold since 1950.
- The consumption of fresh water has almost doubled since 1960.
- The marine catch has increased fourfold.
- Wood consumption, both for industry and household fuel, is now 40% higher than it was 25 years ago.

Growth in the use of material resources has, however, slowed in recent years, the report says, adding: "It is two other crises that are nudging humanity towards the 'outer limits' of what the earth can stand."

First, pollution and waste are exceeding the planet's sink capacities to absorb and convert them. Annual carbon dioxide emissions have quadrupled over the past five years.

"Global warming is a serious problem, threatening to play havoc with harvests, permanently flood large areas, increase the frequency of storms and droughts, accelerate the extinction of some species, spread infectious diseases – and possibly cause sudden and savage flips in the world's climates."

Second is the growing deterioration of renewables – water, soil, forests, fish, biodiversity.

- 20 countries already suffer from water stress, having less than 1,000 cubic metres per capita a year.
- Water's global availability has dropped from 17,000 cubic metres per capita in 1950 to 7,000 today.
- A sixth of the world's land area is now degraded as a result of overgrazing and poor farming practices.
- The world's forests are shrinking, falling by a third since 1970.
- Fish stocks are declining, with about a quarter depleted or in danger of depletion; another 44% are being fished at their biological limit.
- Wild species are becoming extinct 50-100 times faster than they would normally.

As the report points out: "The severest human deprivations arising from environmental damage are concentrated in the poorest regions and affect the poorest people, unable to protect themselves."

For example, the 132 million in water-stressed areas are predominantly in Africa and parts of the Arab states, while deforestation is concentrated in developing countries.

The ultra-rich

New estimates show that the world's richest 225 people have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion, equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the world's people. The UN Human Development report for 1998 says the wealth of the ultra-rich is a "mind-boggling" contrast with low incomes in the developing world.

- The three richest people have assets that exceed the combined Gross Domestic Product of the 48 least developed countries.
- The 15 richest have assets that exceed the total GDP of Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The wealth of the richest 32 people exceeded the total GDP of South Asia.
- The assets of the 84 richest exceed the GDP of China, the most populous country with 1.2 billion inhabitants.
- It is estimated that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all and safe water and sanitation for all is roughly \$40 billion a year. This is less than 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world.
- The country with the biggest share of the world's 225 richest people is the United States with 60 (combined wealth of \$311 billion), followed by Germany with 21 and Japan, with 14.

"Of the estimated 2.7 million deaths each year from air pollution, 2.2 million are from indoor pollution, and 80% of the victims are rural poor in developing countries. Smoke from fuel wood and dung is more dangerous to health than tobacco smoke, but every day women have to spend hours cooking over smoky fires." The report adds: "Poverty and the environment are caught in a downward spiral. Past resource degradation deepens today's poverty, while today's poverty makes it very hard to care for or restore the agricultural resource base, to find alternatives to deforestation, to prevent desertification, to control erosion and to replenish soil nutrients.

"Poor people are forced to deplete resources to survive; this degradation of the environment further impoverishes them."

The high-powered team of economists and development researchers who

compiled the report have done a useful job in bringing together material and showing where the world is going.

There is one word missing from the report, however – capitalism. Appeals to the world to end production for consumption and boost the lot of the working poor will fall inevitably on deaf ears. Not that they are pessimistic, declaring: "Change is not destiny... Change is needed – and possible." They rightly insist: "Hope brings challenge. The high levels of consumption and production in the world today, the power and potential of technology and information, present great opportunities."

These cannot, unfortunately, be realised until the planet produces primarily for need. For that to happen, we have to end a global capitalist system based on production for profit.

There is no alternative.

Goods and assets 'going for a song'



The developing countries will suffer most from the world economic crisis, UNCTAD has warned in its trade and development report for 1998.

"Justice is not served when the costs of market failure and measures taken to bail out creditors are paid by developing countries and at the expense of the living standards of ordinary people."

For the first time in many years, growth in the developing world will fall below that in the developed economies, to less than 2.5% (half that of 1997). The slowdown has also reached China.

Latin America, having achieved in 1997 its best growth performance in a quarter of

a century, is set for a marked slowdown this year. The region is vulnerable to declines in capital inflows, which could produce an even sharper contraction.

Tremendous swings in output have taken place in East Asia. The decline in output is expected to be over 12% in Indonesia, 6-to-8% in South Korea and Thailand, and 2% in Hong Kong. Japan entered recession in 1998 and growth is expected to be negative for the year. Latin America, where on average 10% of exports have been going to East Asia, is particularly vulnerable. In some countries, such as Chile, close to 40% of exports have been going to East Asia.

Commodity-dependent exporters have

most to fear, says the UNCTAD report. Between June 1997 and April 1998, non-oil commodity prices fell by some 10%, with particularly sharp falls for metals and agricultural products. Earnings losses in some commodity-dependent countries could amount to as much as 12% of GDP.

According to the report, "the fruits of the hard work of the developing world, both assets and goods, are now going for a song", as assets are sold at knock-down prices.

30% of natural wealth consumed in 30 years

The global grab for profits has destroyed 30 per cent of the natural world in the last 30 years. The Living Planet Index, published by the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the New Economics Foundation and the World Conservation Monitoring centre, shows that the period of rapid globalisation of the world economy coincided with the most rapacious destruction of the planet.

Looking at 25 years of data on the state of the natural environment, and covering six key areas of consumption from over 150 countries, the first-ever Living Planet Report measures the impact of modern day living on the health of the world's ecosystems.

One of the report's most alarming findings is that freshwater ecosystems declined by 50% from 1970 to 1995, with an average rate of decline of almost 6 per cent per year between 1990 and 1995.

Marine ecosystems deteriorated by 30 per cent from 1970 to 1995, with an average rate of nearly 4 per cent per year from 1990 to 1995.



The world's natural forest cover declined by about 10 per cent from 1970 to 1995, and has been declining on average by 0.5 per cent per year since the 1960s. This is the equivalent to an annual loss of forest the size of England and Wales. Other findings include:

- Consumption pressure is very unevenly distributed around the world – the average person in OECD countries exerts 2.5 times more pressure than an individual in the rest of the world. Globally, consumption pressure is growing

rapidly – at about 5% per year.

- Marine fish consumption has more than doubled since 1960 and most of the world's fish resources are either fully exploited or in decline.
- Wood and paper consumption have increased by two-thirds worldwide since 1960 and, although the world's forests are probably capable of providing sufficient wood to meet this level of demand, most forests are not sustainably managed.
- Freshwater withdrawals have almost doubled since 1960 and it is estimated that we already use more than half of the world's accessible freshwater supply.
- CO₂ emissions have more than doubled since the 1960s and are far in excess of the biosphere's capacity to reabsorb carbon dioxide.

The LPI will be published annually, and WWF deputy director Jorgen Randers hopes it will become "the Dow Jones Index of the global environment".

Dead or alive?

Colin Sandiford considers the nature of life and argues that a predatory new creature threatens humanity – the multi-national corporation

Nature has over the millennia produced a myriad different forms of life from the tiny amoebae to the mammoth blue whale. Yet whether it is a proud lion or just the mould on that last slice of bread, people look and instantly think “that’s life”.

But what is life? Or more importantly what is alive and what is not? Many people have attempted to define what exactly is and what is not alive but the differences are becoming blurred.

For a long time the ability to reproduce was believed to be the ultimate proof of life. There are now, however, machines that reproduce themselves. For over a decade computers have been designed by other computers because they are getting too complex for humans to devise.

Almost all high precision robotic devices are produced by other high precision robotic devices. But are they alive? Most people (myself included) would say not.

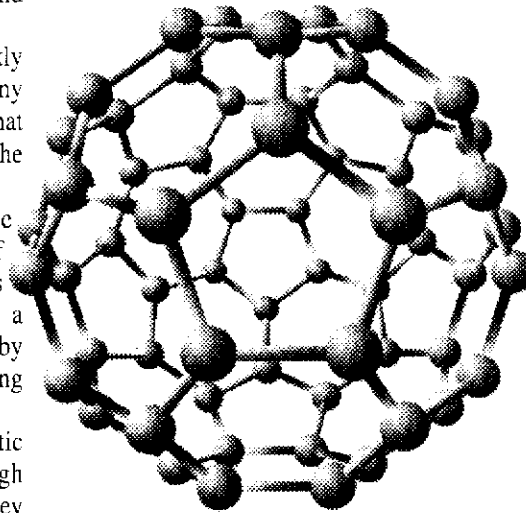
Let us examine a hypothetical creature. This creature is biologically based, each cell of its being is completely self-contained and capable of surviving on its own. If removed from the creature, the cell will continue to survive until it uses up its food supply just like the cells of most life forms. This creature absorbs raw materials and converts them into a usable form which it circulates within itself to keep its cells alive in the same way that we eat food and then circulate it through our blood to keep ourselves alive.

As it uses up the available materials in an area this creature expands or at times moves completely to a new area to gather more materials. After the creature begins to reach a certain size and level of complexity, it begins to divide internally into distinct groupings of cells.

When these cells become distinct enough or resources become too low to support the whole creature, it divides and the offspring leave to find a better area.

These creatures regard each other as friends or rivals, sometimes working together and sometimes fighting, but

always reacting to the other creatures as separate and distinct from themselves, although, many would argue, without conscious thought. Are these “creatures” then alive? Are they real?



The cells that I refer to are individual human beings. The creatures are tribes or societies. The parallel continues on many levels and perhaps is a good way to understand global politics.

Because a new “creature” has appeared

in this environment – the multi-national corporation. These new creatures move from area to area much faster than the old nations can. They move in fast when they see something they want and pull out again just as fast.

They don’t have to worry about the areas they leave behind and have far fewer restrictions when it comes to gathering resources, often exporting vast amounts from an area and putting little back.

It can be as obviously damaging as strip mining or as subtle as using cheap labour to produce items and then “moving operations” when a different locale becomes cheaper. Looked at in this way multi-nationals can be considered predators on a global scale. Humanity had to tame predators to establish society. It’s time to do the same again.

Many of the theories discussed in this article are presented in far greater detail in *Darwin Among Machines*, by George Dyson, published by Penguin Books at £20. A less technical and more in-depth look at artificial intelligence is to be found in Marvin Minsky’s *Society of Mind*, published by Picador at £9.95.

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De Hooch's space beyond

by Corinna Lotz

For those not familiar with England's oldest public art gallery, go now, because after Christmas, it will be closed until the next millennium.

In a peaceful green setting, it has a wonderful collection of Old Masters. But in addition, it is presently displaying the first-ever one-man show of paintings by

Pieter de Hooch.

Be prepared for queuing since the 41 pictures gathered here have attracted record crowds to Dulwich, with 6,000 people arriving over the first 10 days of the show.

De Hooch worked in the Dutch town of Delft where he arrived in 1652 as a 20-

year-old artist. Around that time a new ability to depict architectural space appeared in oil painting in the city.

The combination of scientific perspective with a sensitive approach to human emotion became a special feature of what some call the "Delft school".

The brief blossoming of Delft painting included not only Johannes Vermeer, but also Carel Fabritius, a pupil of Rembrandt. (Fabritius' famous *View of Delft*, by the way, can be seen in the National Gallery.)

De Hooch's grasp of colour and the painterly surface is not as luxurious and deft as that of his more famous contemporary, Vermeer.

But this unique exhibition reveals that De Hooch developed an astounding mastery of complex architecture and space.

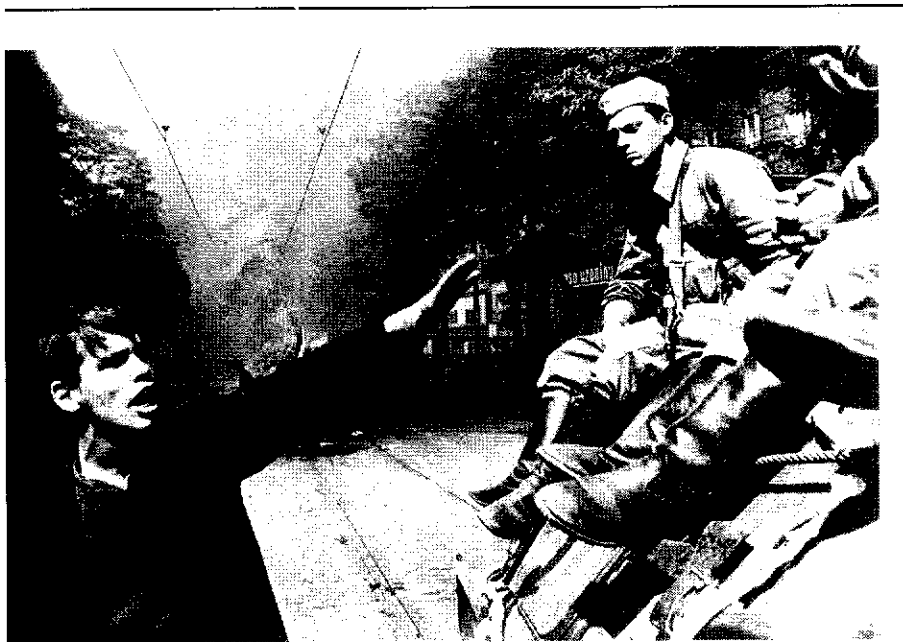
His psychological insights are just as profound, and perhaps even more universal. The relationship of people to each other and to their physical surroundings is at the heart of his work. He reveals and defines this relationship through light and space.

An orchestrated movement into depth, from the immediate to the far-away, appears in every one of his paintings. He leads the eye – and with it the mind – into a journey through the picture plane.

The painting called *A Merry Company with Two Men and Two Women* has a fascinating softness of light and tenderness of mood. We see a man dressed in a black jacket who is looking at a woman seated next to him.

He holds her arm lightly by the wrist. Meanwhile another woman, seen only from the back, pours wine from a flagon for another man standing facing her. The events of state, religion, war, politics are absent. We are shown the intimate and personal. The outside world is suggested only by a large painting showing a harbour with ships.

The sense of calm that pervades De



Prague 1968: Images of the end of spring

With his camera Josef Koudelka immortalised the shock to citizens of Prague when Warsaw Pact troops invaded their city in August 1968. Armed forces from Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria and the USSR entered Czechoslovakia. Dubcek, the leader of the Czech Communist Party, was kidnapped and flown out of the country. The Prague Spring, as the Czech party's moves against Stalinist oppression became known, was brought to a swift end, but Koudelka's pictures were smuggled out of the country. Eleven stunning images from 1968, along with theatre photography, can be seen until October 31 in the Lyttelton Foyer at the National Theatre, Southbank, London. Other photos by Koudelka will be shown at the National Museum and Gallery in Cardiff from November 7.

Hooch's domestic interiors reveals a desire for peace and order. This was not surprising in a country which fought against the brutal oppression of Catholic Spain. Dutch independence was not fully recognised until 1648.

The Dutch lost their global supremacy at sea to England between 1652 and 1666. Most of De Hooch's best works were made in the 1650s, the short space between two wars with England.

Although he shows the world outside, it is still the built environment. When we join a woman spreading out clothes in the sun for bleaching, for example, we are still enclosed by walls. We see the churches and houses of the town, but not beyond.

De Hooch always leads the eye into a sequence of spaces, passage ways, where light falls on still another object or surface – a wooden shutter, a metal latch, a tiled floor, a picture frame, a brick wall, a fence or the leaves of a tree.

It is this guided tour to the physical "beyond" which may be considered his unique contribution. It is a closely observed "other", and a humanly constructed other. The wildness of the uncontrolled, whether in nature or in human beings, is strictly shut out.

De Hooch shows women working or looking after children in beautifully kept rooms. While today's feminists may scoff at the emphasis on a woman's role in the home, he fills his scenes with tremendous dignity and tenderness.

His view of women is a transposition of the "divine" to the ordinary and in doing so, he makes the ordinary divine. One of his greatest compositions shows a woman nursing an infant next to a window. She is a Madonna without a halo.

His portrayal of the relation between mothers and their children is just as personal as those between men and women. The Dutch attitude to children reflected the move from a hierarchic top-downwards society to a more secular,



open society. In the eyes of the French and the English in that time, the Dutch were thought to be far too indulgent towards children, since harsh discipline was discouraged.

As the monasteries were abolished in the Dutch Protestant Republic, the family increasingly superseded the church as the principle way that morals and character were to be developed. De Hooch expresses this revolutionary transformation in society.

Pieter de Hooch. Dulwich Picture Gallery until November 15. College Road, London SE21. Tel: 0181 693 5254. Open Tuesdays to Fridays 1-5; Saturdays and Bank Holiday Mondays 11-5. Sundays 2-5. Admission charge to the Gallery £3/£1.50 (free on Friday); Exhibition £2/£1. Free guided tours on Saturday and Sunday at 3pm.



Pictures: *A Woman and a Child in a Bleaching Ground* 1657-59; *A Woman Nursing an Infant with a Child and Dog* 1658-60.

Reclaim Hardcore for the hard core

The H.E.A.D.F.U.K. collective is made up of young people who are disillusioned with the deterioration of the rave scene and with the changes that are taking place within society. The collective forms the foundation for a new movement which aims to further the progression of all aspects of Hardcore dance culture and to raise the consciousness of the people working within it.

We aren't motivated by profit but instead want to give something back to like-minded people. All profits made from any events we stage go back into the collective to build resources and fund future, and eventually free, parties. We hope that we will soon reach a stage where the resources that the collective have access to will be open to anyone who has decided to turn their back on commercialism. From speaking to people we have met, it is apparent that these people exist in their multitudes and all that is needed is a movement which will bring them together.

The collective was established so that people could come together at affordable parties and express themselves through the many facets of Hardcore dance culture. We already have plans under way for our own record label, website and film workshop because we believe that if the industry doesn't serve us and our outlook, then we should set up our own industry that will. By pandering to the existing format there can be no real space for progression. In trying to change

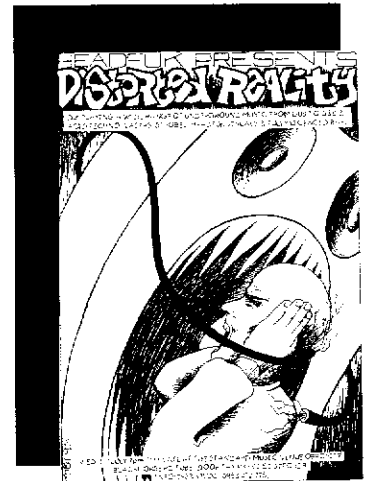
it you will still be left with elements of the old in the new.

It has reached a point where we feel that this is no longer good enough and thus H.E.A.D.F.U.K. was born. Our parties are a celebration of the good things in life and seek to develop new talent at root level without the profit motive.

The underground scene in this country does still exist in a boiled-down form but is polluted by greedy promoters who claim to be underground whilst they charge extortionate entrance fees and are sponsored by big corporations. This is most evident in the British Hip-Hop scene, which has seen something of a resurgence in recent years, but where many of the people attending events are there because it's the latest 'in' thing and express no real love of the culture. We aim to reclaim this and other scenes for the people who have the energy and innovation to send it in the right direction, away from big business.

Everyone has something that they can contribute to H.E.A.D.F.U.K. whether you DJ, MC, write music, paint, sculpt, make films or just like to let loose on the dancefloor then we welcome you and your ideas.

**Contacts: T: 0958 472 775 + 0956 979 441
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