

## Chapter One

# *The Global Crisis*

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*Crisis factors: (War – Population – Environment – Resources – Social disintegration) – Deterioration in quality of life. – The dominance of the market. – A transient phenomenon. – Effect of deception on citizen lives. – Economic fallacy of land, labour and capital as ‘factors of production’. – Man today merely a consumer. – Citizenship roles – shared responsibility and relationships. – Education in government hands rather than citizen hands.*

The modern world is in a state of increasingly dangerous turmoil; its affairs are out of hand and out of control and a stage has been reached where the entire edifice of a commercially dominated civilisation, armed with hitherto unprecedented industrial technologies and weapons of war, is approaching a climax of total collapse.

Nothing of course is easier than to make such predictions; they have been part of the stock-in-trade of judgemental utterances down the ages and the off-the-cuff rejections of such doomsday talk has also its own history of constancy. But how justified today are either such predictions or their rejection? Are things today in such terms really so very different? Or so much worse?

The answer would seem to be, yes, they really are. Doomsday views are not, as possibly heretofore, the province of disgruntled egos deploring that the world is assuming characteristics they may find strange and uncongenial. They spring from a focus on several imposing and objectively measurable trends which are shaping the modern world, and which, despite the advantages they are reputed to yield, are creating immense dangers. These trends share several characteristics; in their modern form they are new, their scale is novel, they are essentially transient, they are inherently destructive and most importantly of all, none of them springs from any widely shared, deeply considered view of what the nature and direction of our societies should be. All of them come, for the most part, from powerful sectional interests. Referred to here is a series of crisis factors:

1. War and armaments
2. Population excess
3. Environmental abuse
4. Resource squandering
5. Social disintegration

### **War**

War and armaments may well be the most obvious of our dangers, but despite a great deal of 'protest' action by pacifists and peace activists generally, action having no apparent affect whatsoever on the forces promoting the danger, it is possibly the least considered.

We are clearly moving into a phase of generalised global conflict on the basis of increasingly sophisticated and destructive war technologies in the hands of giant super-powers, and this brute fact has come to be passively accepted as a normal aspect of our everyday lives. The Americans were the first to deploy nuclear weapons in the war against Japan in 1945. It is now known that at the time Japan was already making overtures for peace; the decision to bomb the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which estimates indicate killed 150,000 in an instant and wounded 94,000, often with intense body burns and radiation poisoning, was quite unnecessary. What then impelled the US government to perpetrate such a barbaric atrocity, surely one of the most savage war crimes in all history?

We do not know; perhaps we shall never know; but it was Bernard Shaw who remarked, 'A nation armed and prepared for war can no more help going to war than a chicken can help laying an egg.' Today, a UN report states that the number of nations with nuclear capabilities is approaching thirty; the number will continue to increase for the simple reason that no one seems able to stop it. The resources devoted to war weaponry and contiguous needs in all major countries continue to increase; each year 'Armaments Fairs' are held where the latest and most effective means of killing the largest number of people are on display, and which their promoters seek to persuade governments to purchase. Destructive potential is obviously approaching some sort of climax; there is, after all, a limit to the degree of destruction that can be achieved before the capacity of the destroyer to enlarge it is itself exhausted.

We learn from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute that: 'World military expenditure in 2004 is estimated to have

been \$975 billion at constant (2003) prices and exchange rates or \$1035 billion in current dollars. This is just 6 per cent lower in real terms than at the 1987–88 peak of cold war world military spending. As a global average, 2004 world military expenditure corresponds to \$162 *per capita* and 2.6 per cent of world GDP. However, there is a wide variation between regions and countries in the scale and economic burden of military spending.

The major determinant of the world trend in military expenditure is the change in the USA, which makes up 47 per cent of the world total. US military expenditure has increased rapidly during the period 2002–2004 as a result of massive budgetary allocations for the ‘global war on terrorism’, primarily for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. These have been funded through supplementary appropriations allocated to the Department of Defence for the financial years 2003–2005 and amounted to approximately \$238 billion and exceeded the combined military spending of Africa, Latin America, Asia (except Japan but including China) and the Middle East in 2004 (\$193 billion in current dollars).’

What looms large today is the imminence of another global war, and for reasons which relate to all wars of the modern era, there is no *need* for these wars. They do not stem from any personal animosity of the combatants. English and German soldiers celebrated Christmas in 1914 by forgetting all about war and by having a game of football in ‘no mans’ land’. They did not want war, they did not want to fight, they simply wanted to affirm and enjoy their common humanity; but the powerful, economic and political forces which dominated their lives and which were beyond their control, felt impelled to make war regardless of any expression of popular aversion or of any regard for moral precept. The biblical command, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ was transformed into the military command, ‘Thou *shalt* kill, or be shot for refusing to obeying orders.’ The common factor of all modern wars has been the prevalence of conscription and the powerlessness of civilians and soldiers alike to prevent them starting, or to stop them when they do.

Wars in the past were the result of personal decisions by ruling potentates and the motive was generally that of ambition, the desire for more power or to avenge some real or fancied wrong. Those who did the fighting were simply obeying orders. It is only in the modern era that ordinary citizens have been deemed as a matter of right to have any voice in determining affairs of state, or deciding issues of peace and war. Yet the development points to a paradox; despite the

development of the apparent voice of democracy and the desires of the ordinary people to live in peace, the war danger has in no way abated. Instead it has assumed increasingly destructive forms of such magnitude that massive armament programmes absorbing a quite staggering proportion of the economic resources of the different governments around the world have now become a permanent backdrop to all our lives.

Why this should be is a matter seldom brought into the arena of political discussion. Ordinary people do not want war, they are the ones made to fight and kill, who endure death or mutilation and whose homes and families are so often destroyed. Yet if they are presumed to have control of their destinies why do wars ensue at all?

We will revert to this problem later, it is one ensuing from the notion that democracy on a mass basis is either feasible or realisable; at this stage we must be content to note the extent to which the problem prevails.

Sooner or later the world will be engulfed in another conflict where these armaments will be used and the kernel of the tragedy will be not that people wanted to start a war but that they had no idea how to prevent it. The problem is part of the general crisis of modern life, and stems from the prevalence of so many illusions regarding the efficacy of democracy when attempts are made to make it work on a mass basis.

### **Population**

The population of China is greater today than the global population of half a century ago. Again we are in a situation with no historical precedent, for China is but a random example of a global phenomenon where mankind's numbers themselves have become a virus of global dimensions. These numbers continue to expand at a prodigious rate in almost every part of the world despite the accelerating death rates from the traditional curbs of war, disease and famine; despite too the greater prominence now awarded to male and female homosexuality. If this latter factor is regarded as one of nature's safety barriers to excess numbers it is noteworthy that many religions continue to oppose it on assumed moral grounds.<sup>1</sup> It is an increase of numbers accompanied by economic expectations of ris-

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[1] By July 2005, the world will have 6.5 billion inhabitants, 380 million more than in 2000 or a gain of 76 million annually. Despite the declining fertility levels projected over 2005–2050 the world population is expected to reach

ing consumption standards in relation to car ownership, long distance transport of essential items of food, of expectations related to acquiring TV and radio equipment, computers and to mobile and other telephones. To these factors must be added the demand for housing and for household conveniences such as cookers, refrigerators, microwave ovens, wash machines, toiletries and clothing, and the increasing demand for air travel and mass tourism. Taken together this market expansion of consumerist demand has become a witches' cauldron of problems, problems which are already pressing against the limits of resource availability, the limits of environmental protection from degradation, to say nothing of problems of ordinary economic manageability, and which are increasingly threatening the stability of the productive systems which sustain them.

There is no prospect whatsoever that the vast majority of the global population currently living in primitive rural conditions, or herding in vast, teeming, urban slum areas, will ever come to enjoy, (if that indeed is an accurate employment of the verb), the consumption standards which prevail in Europe, North America and elsewhere. The combined number of these materially richer people is only a fraction of the world total and already the extent of their demands is reaching saturation point in terms of resource availability and deleterious environmental and social effects. The blunt fact is that in many respects we have already over-reached ourselves. Yet all governments of rich countries, with an eye perhaps to the next election and subject to pressures from global economic forces, are geared to confronting these developments not with conservation and a wise restraint, but to increasing 'growth' at almost any cost.

### **The Environment**

It happens to be the only one we have. Yet the current practice is to poison it, to destroy unnumbered species on which the ecosystem is kept in balance, and to pump massive quantities of effluents into the air, which undermine, where they do not destroy, the workings of the ozone layer. The focus instead is on those products such as fish, timber, cash crops and so on which, whilst raising consumption

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9.1 billion according to the medium variant and will still be adding 34 million persons annually by mid-century. Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2005). *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision. Highlights*. New York: United Nations.

standards of a tiny minority of the global population, are impoverishing and degrading those of countless millions of others, others whose cheap labour and currently available resources of raw materials, priceless agricultural land and, perhaps above all, water, are already showing signs of having reached the limits of their availability. There is a curious supposition, widely prevalent and by no means confined to science fiction, that when we have finally destroyed the natural basis of any existence at all on this planet we shall perhaps be able to move to another. It springs of course from a realm of fantasy, but it appears to be the unspoken assumption of all economic activity, and of all government policies related to it.

### **Resources**

Our industrial and technological civilisation has been made possible by a relatively plentiful supply of energy, principally derived from coal and oil. Oil is cheaper than coal to extract and to transform into the forms needed to propel machines, so that whilst coal had a head start as the basis for industrial production, the rapid increase in the demand for a ready fuel has seen a much greater emphasis on oil. One result has been the closure of many productive coal mines, despite the availability of reserves. But once a coal mine is closed the workings generally become unusable as pit props are allowed to fall in and working roofs collapse, so that to reopen a mine is a considerable economic undertaking. The former British coal industry is today but a skeleton of its former capacity, just as it is in other important producer countries such as Poland, where many mines have been abandoned. In energy terms oil is currently king, but we have to note that both fuels are indeed a finite resource in what is, after all, a finite planet. This means that exponential increases in demand cannot fail to confront stark physical limits of availability. The early days, when oil could be scooped from near-surface sources has already given way to the need to pump it from depths of three miles or more, and some authorities who have sought to make sense of statistical material are now predicting that oil production will peak in less than a decade.

But it will peak for the first time in oil production history against a backdrop of a continuous exponential increase in demand and of infinitely greater mass-consumer markets in Asia and Latin America which are being 'developed' in a bid to emulate the lifestyle of

Europe and North America, whose populations are of course considerably smaller.<sup>2</sup>

The same authorities have investigated the energy resources to be derived from other sources such as solar power, wind farms and water power, but there seems to be substantial agreement that collectively they can do no more than marginally meet either current or future demands as currently entertained. The verdict would appear to be inescapable, that we are heading for a pronounced energy shortage, one that can only be met by a rapid reduction of demand. It is a prospect which is already overshadowing much official policy-making of those powers, notably the USA, whose economies are based on cheap energy availability. But the policy is in no way concerned to reduce energy consumption, rather it is to maintain and increase it in an insane pursuit of economic growth. One inevitable result is conflict to ensure command of available resources; we can, in consequence, expect more military aggression such as that launched by the USA on Iraq in 2003.

Coupled with the problem of oil is also that of water, an even greater basic resource. An industrialised economy needs prodigious supplies of water in the business of machine manufacture, of chemical processing of materials such as plastics and other basic materials; once agriculture is industrialised, it becomes utterly dependent on irrigation, itself dependent on water supplies far in excess of that required by peasant farmers using traditional practices.

It may be noted in passing the extent to which industrialised farming is dependent on inputs of inorganic fertilisers which in turn are products of the oil industry, and the extent to which increased disease-proneness of the crops being grown by such methods creates a need for a wide range of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides (do they not all constitute a cocktail for homicide?), which have a marked deleterious effect on river systems and which, in turn, can scarcely fail to poison water supplies and all forms of life dependent on them. In any case water today has become another

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[2] Every day in 2003, some 11,000 more cars merged onto Chinese roads—4 million new private cars during the year. Auto sales increased by 60% in 2002 and by more than 80% in the first half of 2003. If growth continues apace, 150 million cars could jam China's streets by 2015—18 million more than were driven on U.S. streets and highways in 1999.

The United States, with less than 5% of the global population, uses about a quarter of the world's fossil fuel resources—burning up nearly 25% of the coal, 26% of the oil and 27% of the world's natural gas. (Worldwatch Institute).

source of conflict, as may be noticed in rural areas of China and Russia, between India and Pakistan and between Israel and Palestine. As industrial growth continues at its present exponential speed we must expect, in addition to the social distresses, increased water shortages which swollen urban concentrations will inevitably create, and an increase in the outbreak of water wars.

### **Social Disintegration**

The evidence is all around us. Civilisation does not spring from, nor is it dependent on, industrial growth, at whatever speed it may be essayed; it depends on advances in moral perception and moral practice in the pursuit of truth and beauty. These in turn depend on the quality of personal relationships that prevail and it is not for nothing that the core of the teaching of all major religions is the injunction to 'love thy neighbour'. Ultimately human happiness is not dependent on the extent of personal wealth or the quantity of personal possessions that can be accumulated, or the ability to travel at will to remote places, or the number of fine dinners we may consume. All these matters have their place; a comfortable home and an adequate diet are obviously preferable to homelessness and starvation, but what then is their place?

Do we attain these objectives within a framework of moral imperatives which enhance the quality of our personal relationships and our moral existence? Or do we sacrifice these personal factors to a single-minded pursuit of material objectives? For this is what is occurring. Factors such as growth, efficiency, greater productivity, a higher gross national product and similar economic nostrums have now been elevated to a status of what Kipling once called 'The Gods of the market place'; an elevation reflected as much as anywhere in the record of public holidays. At the beginning of the 19th Century there were at least forty saint's days and other festivals of religious significance in the calendar. In England and Wales there are now only six, and the significance of the nomenclature applied to them is its own testimony to the profundity of the change of outlook. They are now called 'bank' holidays. We simply celebrate the days on which the banks are closed.

It would not be difficult to cite here masses of statistics relating to increases in divorce rates and family breakdown, to the extent to which our hospitals and prisons are getting bigger and fuller, the increasing drug addiction, especially among the younger age groups, the way muggings and street violence combined with

drunkenness and violence are becoming part of the normal backdrop of many peoples lives — especially at weekends in urban areas; the increase of depression and suicide, again particularly among the young, the commonplace occurrence of obscene language, the proliferation of discourtesy and bad manners, the disposition to revile or abuse what was once held sacred, the growth of cynicism and distrust of elected leaders — all too often justified as they make pretence, prevarication and falsehood part of the ordinary coinage of relationships in public life.

The blunt fact is that the quality of life, despite, and all too often because of, the elevation of consumption standards to unprecedented and often excessive levels, has sharply deteriorated over the last two generations or so. Quality is sacrificed to quantity, and quantity is proving to be the enemy of quality to a marked degree. The primary question of ‘how good?’ has been displaced by ‘how much?’ and the evidence is all around us in the way people dress, eat, talk, relate, play and behave.

### **Supermarkets**

Any such statistics would need to be considered in the context of how the market is impinging on peoples lives. It is the market which has masterminded the growth of supermarkets and shopping malls, in complete disregard that shopping was formerly, and fairly recently, a social activity. The local shop was run by local people and local transactions would help to enrich local life. Today the remaining local stores are all too often simply branches of some giant chain enterprise and the profits are creamed off to some remote boardroom where directors commonly vote themselves enormous salary and benefit deals with funds which formerly went to enrich the local community.

Well, of course, supermarkets are wonderfully convenient places, with an immense range of wares from which to choose. What more could one want? the bemused shopper may be disposed to ask. But the real price tag is in the multiple bankruptcies of local, family-owned shops. Perhaps no less significant is the bankruptcy of numerous small local farms. Why bother to pay someone in Wiltshire to grow onions in one of the most fertile areas in the entire globe when it is cheaper to fly them in from Australia? The small shopkeeper and the small farmer go to the wall; what is left is a shopping experience where strangers shop among other strangers, pay their bills to strangers, buy their petrol to drive their cars from other

strangers and then return home to consume those ever-so-convenient ready-prepared foods and watch television.

And of course the supermarket price tag carries another downer. In perhaps an ultimate sense, and even its more mundane aspects, the quality of life each of us lives is determined not so much by material things as by that ineluctable factor, our personal relationships, and supermarkets are declarations of war against those of the local community. When the local stores are bankrupted, when centralised tax policies combine with giant out-of-town chain shops to make local farming so economically hazardous that if they are not driven to sell up, the farmer's offspring register a determination to devote their lives to anything but farming, where then are the local relationships which were once the moral and psychological backbone of community life?

With these developments the people cease to be citizens, they become customers, clients, consumers; the economic aspect is elevated to an enormous preponderance over everything else in their lives. This is not a matter of citizen choice, but of market forces which regard the matter of citizen choice as a factor to be manipulated with all the skills the advertising industry can deploy.

These forces will argue, as they often do, that the consumers do have a choice and that they can choose not to attend their shops. This is only too true, but it is a truth that conceals a lie, a lie ignoring that human frailties and susceptibilities are being played upon on a mass basis with ruthless disregard of the moral, environmental and long term economic consequences of what they promote. And of course they promote their advertising propaganda over every information channel they can intrude upon, to the extent that the social and educational aspects of people's lives are dwarfed by the consumerist message. And this to a degree that, to take a leading example, the channels of communication are saturated with competitive messages urging people to purchase one brand of car rather than another, whilst the moral, social and environmental consequences of owning a car at all are never brought into serious focus.

### **Empires**

So the market, thriving on mergers and takeovers into ever larger entrepreneurial units that are now global in their range, aided by near miraculous technical means of communication and projection, is aided too by a wanton squandering of resources. It is the world's latest empire, one to which even elected leaders must now bow the

knee if they are to attain leadership positions, and which is having a field day as it proceeds to dominate, desecrate, devastate and disintegrate our ancient civilised social structures.

But empires have a way of having their day, they come and they go, as this particular one is surely going. What may be of note is whereas past empires tended to have a lifespan measured in millennia, modern ones tend to reign supreme for a century or so. They do not stay the course. For one thing they have risen rapidly, mainly on the basis of a transient superiority of modern gunpower; but in history what rises quickly tends to fall at much the same rate, and the fate of any global market empire, like that of its major protagonist the USA, is only too likely to be settled in a matter of decades.

But on its way down the concern here is with the devastation it is inflicting on localised social structures, and on this the truth, being a force of its own, has its own way of registering. Despite all the professionalized arts of propaganda and manipulative persuasion, people have taken its measure and are reacting accordingly. They *know* they are being got at, manipulated, deceived and bamboozled, they know an image of the social order which tolerates a powerful medium such as television ought to be in the hands of educators, artists, and others able to elevate the whole adventure of life instead of in the hands of market hustlers concerned only to make a quick buck out of their gullibility and essential innocence. They know, however lacking in the ability they may be to articulate their awareness, that they are being lied to and defrauded of reality, and of course they react accordingly. Some will take the market message at its own valuation, buy their cars and queue for airline tickets to Timbuktu. Others, less equipped with resources, will channel their frustration into Saturday night drugs, drunkenness and depravity as, with insensate violence, they make urban centres ungovernable and as they help to fill our overloaded prisons, hospitals and mortuaries.

Government leaders announce measures to stamp out violence and to curb drugs and excessive drinking, but it is all the stuff of never-never land. This bogus black and white reality ignores that the root of this and so many other problems is government itself and the framework of market dominance and of market values it helps to maintain; a framework that is eroding civic trust, civic responsibility and even civic identity. It is a framework which lacks any moral backbone or purpose other than a determination to pursue self enrichment regardless of any cost or damage to the social framework.

### Economic Theory

Traditional economic theory has a fundamental axiom that there are three 'factors of production', namely land, labour and capital, and that wealth creation was the result of a carefully calculated balance of them. To this day the same basic projection is fundamental to economic teaching, despite the results of at least a century and a half of its practice. What is overlooked here is that to remove humanity from the centre of the picture is to lower its status in the reckoning, and that to replace the human-factor-as-cardinal with other factors such as profit or efficiency, is to endorse a process which can scarcely fail to elevate non-human factors to a status whereby humanity is sub-ordinate to them. Labour *cannot* be a factor of production, for if a sane moral order is to have any meaning, it can only be the object of it, and if 'labour', human beings, made, the theologians assure us, in the image of God, are accepted as the object of economic activity, then other factors relating to production must in turn be subordinate. It is a principle that runs counter to almost all current procedures. Work, for example, is not seen, to quote Freud, 'as man's chief contact with reality', not seen as a calling in which refined skills are devoted to the service of others, not seen as a principle means of achieving ordinary dignity, distinction and status, nor seen as a means of sharpening aptitudes for decision-making, for creativity, discrimination, proportion, balance, harmony and self-fulfilment. What then is its point beyond exercising the egoism of selfishness? Modern economics of work are not interested in any such considerations. The person, as 'a factor of production' becomes a tool for the self-aggrandisement of others, is reduced to being a 'hand', and a 'hand' is required only to perform tasks which are pre-ordained by others, repetitive, uncreative and spiritually negative. When human identity is reduced to being a factor of production work ceases to be a calling and becomes merely a job, and whereas a calling is a life-long commitment, a 'job' can, and all too often does, vanish overnight.

This is to question some of the fundamental assumptions on which all dominant modern economic activity is based, because those assumptions are helping to create quite fundamental disorders having ripple effects across the entire social order. For on the same reasoning that the person has become a 'hand' and work a 'job', he has ceased to be a citizen of his community; he has today become a consumer in a mass form of social disintegration. The market forces that displace him from being the central focus in work and production have robbed him of his central role as a citizen. His citizenship

has been negated in the economic sphere by a perverse emphasis on his appetite to consume, and whilst the citizen has become a consumer in economics, and an anonymous voter in mass political structures, in both spheres he has been robbed of vital elements of citizen identity. In the matter of consumption in either sphere, whether in shopping malls or public social services, he is no longer a participant, only a recipient.

Citizenship roles do not grow on gooseberry bushes, they are a product of shared responsibilities, of active participation in making decisions and of the personal relationships which are the warp and the woof of vibrant communities and it is important to see the extent to which modern forms of economic and political organisation are destroying even the possibility of such roles. Our shopping malls, where strangers congregate to make purchases from other strangers, have largely ousted the local family-owned (and run) store; giant bureaucratic forms of 'welfare' have abolished any real element of local responsibility, or of any play of the creative powers of local people in making decisions. Railway companies now no longer seek to serve 'passengers'. They are now called 'customers'. It is not our citizenship role as a traveller which is acknowledged, simply our economic significance. Where the citizen once carefully observed the forms of local custom in a multitude of matters dependent on local power and decision-making, he is now all too often reduced to the completion of paper forms to satisfy some remote centralised bureaucracy. Indeed so far has this process of transformation gone that it now dominates and controls not only administrative matters relating to health, police, planning, transport, energy and water supplies, TV and radio, but also the crucial area of education. One would have thought that in such an emphatically local matter, and one so intimately related to issues of freedom and democracy, a really free people would have made it a matter of primary concern to keep it absolutely out of the hands of any national government run by professional politicians. It is proposed to deal later with the question to what extent a political process conducted on a mass basis and dominated by rival, centrally controlled mass party machines, can have any relationship to the practical imperatives of democracy; here it is noted the extent to which the general working assumptions of modern mass societies are not so much buttressing freedom and democracy as destroying them. They are doing so in the name of 'growth' and 'efficiency', but it is a form of circular reasoning in which efficiency is always tied to 'growth', and growth always tied to effi-

ciency, with no attempt made to explain the moral purpose of either. The results are observably catastrophic. As meaningful social entities our societies are simply falling apart. Various sicknesses of mind and body are multiplying, crime is an increasing feature of everyday life when before it was exceptional, family breakdown is endemic, single parentage a growing affliction on the young, drug abuse has become an apparently necessary common feature of our general lifestyle, suicide rates, especially among the young, are climbing and so too are numerous forms of anti-social and generally destructive tendencies of vandalism, violence and viciousness, whether in individuals or en masse.

We have moved into a brave new world where social and family relationships are being sabotaged or destroyed, where dominant economic and political forces are ensuring the instant commercial gratification of individual consumerist propensities, themselves artfully exaggerated to an absurd degree. These are achieved at the expense of the traditional bonds of mutuality and community involvement, so that modern citizen, isolated, manipulated, indoctrinated, alienated and morally eviscerated, is on a doomsday path of social breakdown on a scale which is inevitably matching the scale of the forces which have brought him to this pass.