

Oh yes. One last thing. The next time a smooth talking hustler like Bill Clinton comes to the door, don't let him in. Stick with politicians you know-- Sam Smith

The gadfly thing

I was recently described in a kind article in Washington's *City Paper* as a "political gadfly." This was neither the first time nor will it be the last. It has happened to me so often that I was able to tell the writer where the word came from (a fly that bites and annoys cattle). In fact, it has happened to me so often that I even have a rowboat called the *Gadfly*.

But being called a gadfly is a little like being bitten by one. It's also, notes Jon Rowe, like Ralph Nader being called a "self-appointed consumer advocate." Where, Rowe wonders, does one go to get a license to become an properly appointed consumer advocate?

People in Washington who call other people gadflies tend to be either *players* or people who wish they were. A player is someone trying to be Assistant Secretary of HUD, someone who represents a major polluter and claims to practice environmental law, someone who is paid large sums of money to shout down Eleanor Clift on national TV or who pays large sums of money to get politicians to wrestle with -- and ultimately defeat -- their own conscience. Players are annoyed by gadflies because they won't play according to the players' rules. On the other hand, gadflies don't clutter up the bureaucracy making dull speeches, and they don't create toxic waste sites or corrupt the political system. They tend to eat Mr. Tyson's chicken rather than fly on his planes. And at the end of the day, they have less explaining to do to their children.

Players tend to be quite insecure which is why they need such an elaborate support system, including the *Washingtonian* magazine, the Gridiron Dinner, the *Washington Post* Style section and the Diane Riem Show. Players consider themselves serious; gadflies not. Russell Baker, a serious man, addressed this matter best in a column in which he pointed out the difference between being serious and being solemn. Baker observed that children are almost always serious, but that they start to lose the trait in adolescence. Washington is the capital of solemnity and few of its elite are truly serious.

Gadflies, on the other hand, are usually serious. A gadfly tends to be someone with ideas, energy and a modicum of talent but who lacks a PR firm, ghostwriter and a proper flair for networking. A gadfly is someone who actually wants to get something done, but often can't -- largely because of all the players in the way.

EF Schumacher once said, "We must do what we conceive to be the right thing, and not bother our heads or burden our souls with whether we are going to be successful. Because if we don't do the right thing, we'll be

doing the wrong thing, and we will just be part of the disease, and not a part of the cure."

Gadflies would agree. They think for themselves. But in Washington thought is something players purchase, just like they purchase gas, condoms or political access. People who think are considered part of the service industry with commensurate compensation and social regard.

Take a run-of-the-mill gadfly such as myself and then some average players -- say the editorial board the *Washington Post* -- and compare their records over a couple of decades. The gadfly approach to freeways, urban policy, Vietnam, the environment and Bill Clinton will, I think, hold up pretty well. The problem gadflies face is not that they are irrelevant or wrong but that their timing is a bit off. The FBI used to categorize members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as "premature anti-fascists." Similarly, many gadflies are just moderates of an age that has not yet arrived. -- s.s.

Making your own money

By David Burman

Three years ago Jeanne was on welfare. Now she operates almost entirely outside the normal economy, thanks to a simple barter network called a local employment trading system or LETS. With LETS, instead of waiting for money to trickle down from somewhere else, Jeanne creates her own money through a medium of exchange called "green dollars." She contributes her skills as a healer and musician to the well-being of the community in exchange for the same green dollars. Since green dollars are always in abundant supply, anyone can afford her services.

Too good to be true? It's simple. It's elegant. It's available. And it's an idea that's working in about 500 communities around the world.

The idea of barter is as old as humanity. Indeed, the concept of money itself was first instituted to assist barter. Community currency is far from new; the first central bank in 12th century Venice was based on it. During the depression of the 1930s, towns in Austria that printed their own currencies thrived while those around them were bankrupt. Now, once again, communities around the world are searching for a means to survive the pressures of unemployment and environmental degradation that have accompanied the globalization of the economy. An answer may be the local employment trading system.

LETS was first developed on Vancouver Island by Michael Linton in early 1983 in response to the disastrous effects of a recession. At that time, the unemployment rate in the communities of the Comox Valley hovered around 25%. Linton designed a simple accounting system in which account holders could purchase goods and services, in whole or in part, by transferring points from their account into that of the seller. Linton labeled the points *green dollars* after his vision of the environmental and social benefits that would follow general use of the system.

In its first four years of existence the system recorded \$350,000 of trading that would not have taken place if the participants had relied entirely on hard currency. Since then, LETS has been spreading throughout the English speaking world.

Linton based his idea on the concept that money is a form of information, a means of measuring the value of something, just as a centimeter is a unit of information to measure length. Imagine that you are going to have a house built. You have assembled all the materials, you have the necessary permits, have acquired the land, and have engaged experienced and skilled workers to do the job. But when you come on the scene to see out how things are going, you find that nothing has happened. The foreman responds to your look of annoyance. "Uh, sorry, we can't start."

"Why not?" you ask incredulously. "Well, we're all out of inches. Used 'em all up on the last house down the road. Have to wait till we can get some more, maybe next week."

It seems absurd that people might not be able to use their valuable skills because there was a lack of information, i.e. money. Yet, these days we are hearing with increasing stridency that we have to cut back on social programs at the very moment when they are needed most because we don't have enough money to pay for them.

The problem arises because money has been treated as a commodity -- a real thing that can be bought or sold -- that is scarce. Yet anyone who has ever played the stock market knows that money is not "real." If a rumor on Wall Street can affect your wealth in seconds, how real can money be? In fact, money has evolved to such an abstraction that we now see huge sums of deutschmarks, yen, sterling and dollars circling the globe in the form of electronic blips, bouncing off satellites, being exchanged for each other on the money market, while having nothing to do with what people actually do for one another.

One of the consequences of currency as a scarce commodity is that it creates rich and poor, not because of greed, but because of the very structure of money itself. If there is only so much to go around, then it is axiomatic that if one person has a lot, many more will have much less. And the more you have, the easier it is to acquire more; the less you have, the easier it is to lose it.

This situation applies equally to nations, regions or individuals. Conditions of affluence and vigorous

redistribution policies slow this trend down, while recessions and tight money policies speed it up. But the mere fact that we have structures such as the income tax, federal transfer payments and foreign aid attests to the inexorable flow of wealth.

In response, Michael Linton proposed that we treat money as the unit of information that it is. Having no value in itself, it can be used freely to encourage trade within the community. Green dollars exist only as accounts held in a central computer. Account holders can buy and sell freely, unimpeded by any restrictions of the money supply.

The function of conventional money that investors think about -- the storage of wealth function -- creates the inequities that negate its use as a medium of exchange. If money is being invested to earn interest, there will be less for us to use for the things we need.

What would happen if there were a way to keep money in the community, so that it would continue to circulate? That is precisely what LETS does.

Economist Abraham Rotstein and political scientist Cohn Duncan argue that, because they exist entirely within their communities, local currencies provide a solution to the dilemma of how to satisfy the need of the state to control inflation without severely constricting employment at the local level. They do so by separating the medium-of-exchange function from the storage-of-wealth function of money. Other economists, such as Guy Dauncey and Hazel Henderson, state that because green dollars are abundant and accessible to all, LETS should be able to eliminate poverty and unemployment while augmenting current, self-help initiatives. Indeed, without networks like LETS, the current strain on the welfare system may cause such social programs to fail, leaving yet more idle capacity and unused resources.

Well, if green dollars circulate freely and stay in the community, where do they come from? One of the things we know about conventional money is that it always comes from somewhere else. If you make your own, some people in authority get very upset with you. One of the most interesting aspects of LETS is that the money is created by the very act of its use. Everyone starts with a balance of zero. So, at the beginning of a LETS system, there are no green dollars in the system. However, when the first person purchases the first item from another, then the amount of local currency agreed upon by the two traders is put in circulation, as the following example illustrates:

When I have a massage for my stiff back, I can pay the \$55 hourly fee in green dollars. I make my appointment and have the massage, but at the end of the appointment, I'll telephone to have the balance transferred from my account into the masseur's. If this were the first trade for either of us, then my account balance would be minus 55, and his would be plus 55. We both would have started out with zero, but in the act of acknowledging my masseur for the massage, we have put 55 green dollars into the community.

I have now paid for my massage; I am not in debt. Although my account shows a negative balance, there will be no interest charged or earned by anyone. At some point, I will bring my balance toward zero by doing a service for someone else or selling some product. Since I am a dentist that's easy to do.

I have also sold my old computer and assisted consensus-building workshops for green dollars. In return, I have bought crafts and meals, had income tax prepared, and acknowledged my appreciation of a fiddle player at a Christmas fair.

One important advantage LETS has over other barter systems is the ability to pay part in cash and part in green dollars for goods or services. So for dentistry, I can cover my office overhead expenses in federal dollars if I choose. The proportion of green to federal dollars in a transaction is entirely up to the parties involved.

In Toronto, the LETS that started with only five members in 1990 now has over 400 active account holders. The goods and services offered ranges from new bicycles and repairs, to handmade clothing, construction, entertainment, health care of all kinds, office work, and tarot card reading. Rural systems like the Saugeen Valley Trading System include farmers as well as crafts people. The Sudbury system, started only last year, has seen a surge of activity, with local small business becoming involved at a rapid rate. Each community defines LETS slightly differently, and adapts it to the community's particular needs.

Although there is diversity, there are many common elements among LETS. All systems are operated by members holding accounts. There is no interest accruing or owed on account balances. Accounting in most systems is done by a central administrator, who enters transactions with a readily available computer program

Since LETS programs are by agreement nonprofit and are controlled entirely by the communities in which they operate, they assist the circulation of skills, services, and goods within the community while, greatly reducing the need for federal currency. Participation in a LETS should not depend on personal philosophy, values, or ideology.

LETS programs are designed to be self-regulating in order to reduce the need for bureaucracy and the danger that the system, like all bureaucratic systems, could come to exist for its own self-perpetuation. People in the community get to know one another, who needs what and who has what to offer. Any person can also find out the balance and trading turnover of any other member, so if someone is not playing well, you don't have to play with them, providing local social control instead of bureaucratic control.

LETS is as close to a biological organism as an economic system can be. It is designed to be self-sustaining. Low administration fees pay for daily operations entirely in green dollars. Federal dollar expenses like telephone and postage come from nominal annual fees. Money for development comes from grants for specific projects. While funds for development of LETS are being sought externally,

no currently functioning LETS has used external funding for administration. A LETS can operate and even thrive without development if it operates according to the self-sustaining design. Those that have depended on external funding, such as the short-lived Charlottetown system, have died when funding expired.

Most systems use some form of checks to keep track of trading and with central recording of transactions. Taxes on regular green dollar income are declarable at par with federal dollars and can be claimed as charitable donations or business expenses.

Although it is too early to see large-scale effects of LETS, advocates make two modest claims: LETS can eliminate poverty and unemployment. The social environment of abundance engendered by a self-issued currency has already helped many people besides Jeanne to become economically more self-reliant. Regular trade fairs and potluck suppers encourage face-to-face contact and the imaginative exchange of services. At a recent event in Toronto's Bain Co-op, the atmosphere was that of a medieval marketplace.

The kinds of care-giving activities traditionally undertaken by women and currently often unacknowledged and unpaid can be used to earn green dollars. The recognition and reward at once remove the exploitative aspects of "women's work," increase the availability of service in the community and acknowledge individual workers.

LETS is an organic economic system that is based on the needs of the local community, rather than the needs of the nation state. Money is generated where and when it is needed, without the need to attract investment that might not be in the long-term interests of the community.

LETS requires no top down intervention to work. People may participate only out of economic self-interest, but in so doing, they change the social environment from one of scarcity where people must guard their possessions for fear of losing them, to one of abundance. LETS appears to address the structural problems of money supply, without threatening the national currency.

Children understand the idea of LETS immediately. It takes adults longer because our present monetary system encourages us to look for complexity. The closer one is to the financial world, the greater the task of unlearning the complex structures required to maintain the economy of scarcity. This unlearning may be an essential part of what theologian and cultural historian Thomas Berry calls the re-invention of the human.

David Burman is a dentist who also teaches at the School of Pharmacy, University of Toronto. This article appeared originally in Peace Magazine, published by the Canadian Disarmament Information Service.

WEATHER REPORT

Just politics

Bernie Sanders, Vermont's re-elected independent in Congress, bucked the trend by -- among other things -- refusing to go negative in his ad campaigns. So reports Andrew Reding for PNS. He did, however, promise to redouble his efforts to pass single payer health insurance. And his ads featured testimonials for his work on such issues as detection of breast cancer and layoffs by corporations. Sanders not only won his traditional urban centers but broke into the normally more conservative rural and small town precincts.

Drug busts

- The Drug Enforcement Administration conducted a two-day "anti-legalization" forum at the FBI-DEA training center in Quantico, VA. Police officers and others were brought in from around the country to be instructed how to beat back growing skepticism about the war on drugs.

- The Smith Kline Beecham Drug Testing Index for the first half of the year shows that nearly 8% of all workplace drug tests proved positive. That's one out of every 12 employees in America who is now defined as a criminal by our government. No wonder they're rushing to build more prisons.

- A study in Australia found that when the state of South Australia decriminalized pot possession, use of cannabis did not increase.

- A German court has ruled that cannabis is safer than alcohol or tobacco and has drastically raised the limit for consumption to be treated only as a misdemeanor. The court said that "After hearing extensive testimony from experts," it had come to the conclusion that "there are practically no objections to the consumption of hashish if it is somewhat orderly. . . Compared to the legal narcotic alcohol and to nicotine, cannabis is very much less dangerous."

Real issues

The Canadian Auto Workers Union has come out in favor of shorter work time, using a variety of approaches such as a shorter workweek, better pensions for early retirement, time off for shift work, parental leave, increased vacation, training, education and travel leaves, extended long weekends, and time off for child or elder care. [Research Dept., CAW, 416-497-4110]

Land of the free

A study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics has found that nearly half the women in prison in 1991 were doing time for nonviolent offenses. . . Meanwhile a GAO report on the Lexington KY federal prison found that 26 women whose mammograms revealed abnormalities were released without being told their test results, or of the need for follow-up medical attention. As of June 1993, there were only one part-time physician's assistant to provide gynecological care for nearly 2000 female inmates. And AIDS patients got to visit doctors once every six months instead of the recommended once a month.

FEEDBACK

The new mainstream

Lots of readers reacted to our exploratory chart on the differences between the old establishment and the new mainstream. A New England university president, for example, plans to use it in his American government class. And a former assistant DA in Massachusetts questioned whether inalienable individual rights belonged (as we put them) in the new mainstream: I sense that individual rights as dominant and inalienable constitutes the current establishment, and that communitarianism, rights balanced by responsibilities, is emerging as the new mainstream.

He also offered these old and new paradigms

Public servants as rulers	Public servants as servants
Representatives: those who represent an abstract will of the people which the representatives purport to discern	Delegates (those who implement an explicit and delegated will of the people)
Governors (those who govern us)	Executives (those who execute our will)

From a green activist in Maine:

National	Local
Economistic	Entrepreneurial
Policy	Practice and behavior
Regulation	Responsibility
External	Internal

From an accountant in Philadelphia:

Religious and family values represented by icons such as Quayle, Robertson etc.	Belief that there is that of God in everyone.
---	---