

Essential Mutualism and Citizenship

A Queensland Perspective

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“This essay was born of my life-long search for a meaningful and enriching life-style that moved beyond the limiting world view of dichotomy. Beyond black-white lie shades of grey. Beyond yes-no lie degrees of consent. Beyond up-down and in-out lie concepts of choice. Power webs within institutions and across populations are effective in oppressing individuals and suppressing free expression. Dictates of sex, gender, class and caste remove choice and stifle options.

After a lifetime of struggle and searching, and thirty years of practical experimentation I have come to the conclusion, Mutualism gives an individual the best chance to live a life that can liberate both those who want too much and those who accept too little.”

Essential Mutualism and Citizenship – A Queensland Perspective (PDF)

An Essay by Lillian Lawson Geddes.

Mutualism strengthens the individuals involved, improves lifestyle opportunities and expands choices.

When I say that I wish to work with others for our mutual enrichment, and, that I also wish to live here in Queensland, and that I also wish to be pro-active as a citizen in the affairs of society, this is what I mean: We need to be political as individuals. Politics is how you and I treat each other, here and now and how we intend to treat each other into the future. If we are going to take our politics personally, we have to be willing to stretch and grow.

As mutualists we have to support each other. As citizens we have to challenge our parliamentarians when we feel they are betraying us. As producers and consumers, we have to be selective about who we trade with.

There is a monster at large, and it is trampling through our neighbourhoods, our parliaments and our marketplaces. Each of us has a relationship to this monster, so it is the nature of this relationship that we must deal with.

Involvement with this monster is contradictory. We feed it while it feeds off us. Any continued involvement without analysis and change gives it strength.

We occupy a paradigm of deprivation, struggle and loss. The modern state is an evolved corporate product of historical patriarchy and militarism. It survives on the installed and perpetuated discouragement of citizens to claim their fair share of the common wealth.

In many situations we have no choice but to transact with Queensland Inc. None the less, the citizen and the state are not conjoint twins. Can a state be “doing well” while sections of its citizens suffer from the state’s activities? It can be, and it does.

Big Business does *not* exist to serve the community. The community *ought not to exist* to serve Big Business. The state-supported and capitalist dominated marketplace relies on subordinated consumers for its very existence. Change will not come from the elites, cabals, cliques and cartels that become rich on the forced participation of the non-rich. Change will come when people stop supporting their own exploitation.

Big Business profits by luring consumers into loss-producing dealings. It profits by offering to help you recover your losses. It profits through extracting from the earth more than the earth’s capacity to recover, and it doesn’t pay its bill.

The books are rigged through a system of double denial. Big Business denies a fair costing basis to transactions, and it denies that it is doing it. Big Business denies the true costs of its activities arguing the ideology of The Free (unrestrained) Market.

“Globalisation” is a phase the world’s economies are going through. Adapting to rapid social, commercial and material changes has been difficult for many people. Our inability to see the held contradictions of others, while coping with our own held contradictions has caused us to travel in camouflage for reasons of self-defence.

A Mock-Mutualist is a person who talks the language of mutualism and at the same time acts unfairly. When puny and jaundiced transactions outnumber the mutually beneficial transactions, our social capital is run down, neighbourhoods become dysfunctional, neighbours become alienated and relationships become deficient. As a result, neighbourhood as a social unit becomes anaemic.

People with mutualistic, life-generating desires struggle to find a place in such a culture. The socialising process ensures that children are constructed into *an image* of idealised subservient citizen. Very few escape this process. The norm has become selfish and extractive. Those who never become strong enough or aware enough to struggle out of such a shackled paradigm truly live in *reduced circumstances*.

While our position in relation to our own held contradictions reflects our uniqueness, boundaries around one’s own contradictions *within* mutualism and *towards* the state have to be clarified so that interaction between two individuals or parties can be entered into honestly.

The social contract is predicated not between citizen and state, but between citizen and citizen. If we are to treat each other well, we have to treat each other honestly. Our society is constructed by our one-to-one transactions.

If you and I do not treat each other fairly we take part in this life-reducing practice. We are living through a time when the state is not protecting its citizens from the predatory marketplace. Fraud is endemic. Consumer protection is weak, and where it exists, it is cloaked in the language of mock-mutualism. Truth in advertising is a very dubious concept.

Poverty is contagious. It is something you catch in the predatory marketplace. You catch it when you use self-diminishing tools that you were taught to use at a very young age. Many of us were mortgaged at birth through intergenerational disadvantage. For example, if you are born in a family who rents, you are very likely to be locked into having to rent most of your life too.

The tools that could make a difference are kept out of sight and out of the minds of the curious and inquiring person, but the knowledge that these tools exist is intuitive to those with a desire for mutuality.

“The revolution within the revolution means: seeing through your own eyes, learning to touch the external world with your own hands, translating experience in your mind, shaping sounds, making your own words and dissolving the mask, which is not just imposed but has grown into your own skin through centuries of being directed by someone else.” -Shiela Rowbotham.

Our ignorance – what I prefer to call our position of *unlearnedness* about basic personal, household and small group economics – holds us victim to predatory marketplaces. For capitalism to continue to reinvent itself it must disguise itself as mutualistic in order to attract new participants.

The Green Economy is a mesmerising paradigm. Consumers are attracted to products and services that promise solutions to problems. Consumers are duped by “green” advertising and “concerned” claims.

If we are to move beyond disadvantage and the discouragement that we feel, we must learn to recognise when we are contributing to our own disadvantaged situations. We must learn to separate Essential Mutualism from Mock-Mutualism.

Mock Mutuals say “We are in this together”. They do not tell you “You are being duped while you feel included. We mock you and profit from you. You will continue to transact with us because we tell you that this is your best choice and we love you.” You have to recognise for yourself when you are being mocked, duped, mis-led and lied to. And if you, dear reader, mock others then you need to stop.

This operating style – that of mocking and duping – is contagious. You catch it in families, in schools, in work places and market places.

- The *publisher – consumer* relationship of media is a marketplace.
- The *writer – reader* relationship is a marketplace.
- The *employer – employee* relationship is a marketplace. The *landlord-tenant* relationship is a marketplace.
- So too the *rich – poor* relationship, the *judge – plaintiff* and *judge – defendant* relationships.

The give and take of transactions in these marketplaces is rarely balanced and fair, but you and I can learn to be fair, to act with fairness, and to achieve fair. We can build marketplaces that enrich us in right proportion to our contribution.

In the motley green economy – capitalism in camouflage clothing – the individual can be both victim and perpetrator. They/we are mostly unaware of the concepts that keep them/us transacting within disadvantaged and abusive marketplaces. They/we are mostly unable and often unwilling to do the necessary inquiry which could lead to change.

We must learn to see what has to change, and we must learn to change it. I hold to this:

We cannot work for structural change through any organisation that within itself reproduces or replicates the relationships of power that are dominant in capitalism. We are confronted by, and participate in, invisible organising patterns that are forms of social abuse, and these patterns of working are installed into our daily lives. We have to understand the way in which we disburse power within our groups as well as the relationships between each of us to that power. We need to change the perceptions of our individual roles in the economy.

We need to dismantle the machinery that is delivering us towards new forms of economic slavery. We need to take our tools to this machinery because it is breaking up society, and we need to do this with the same spirit and precision that has inspired and focused social resistance for centuries.

At the same time as we dismantle these forms of abuse, so must we build the replacements forms that are restorative and mutually enriching. In action which is conscious of its purpose, we can remove the distorted and dysfunctional patterns of organising, and replace them with functional patterns which deliver equity.

We have to learn to share the fruits of our work in right relationship to its production. In this way we start to correct the distortions embedded in current social forms that we participate in. We serve no gain if we only replace one abusive form of social organisation with another.¹

Because you and I are equal and free citizens, I cannot force you to work on any task at any given moment without your consent. Nor do I want to. I, therefore, can only set out my minimum standards, and be willing to explain to you what I expect if we are to transact with each other.

- I insist on generosity. The transactions between us – you and I – are to *generate* something of increasing value. If you do not come to me to ensure that both you and I are supported by the transaction, then please stay away.
- I insist on benchmarking a *not-lose, not-lose* outcome for all commercial transactions between myself and another. Commerce was here before capitalism, and it is being rebuilt. You and I can establish a benchmark position to negotiate around.
- I insist on accountability – the ability to account for the *full value* of the transaction. This includes the commitment to top-up any shortfall that slips in if I have overlooked something, and the insistence of receiving any shortfall that is due to me. My benchmark statement is my half-way position that lets me look at both sides of the account, and adjust when and where necessary.
- I insist on inclusiveness in the figuring. I insist on a bookkeeping method that includes my costs of collecting a service with your costs of providing the service so that the true costs can be described. As well, a broad base of benefits is considered to ensure transactions are supportive of each of the transacting parties.

¹ Author, circa 1998

- I insist on tracking the effects of transactions after the preliminary dockets are settled in order to assess where the *effects of the trading* fell. In this way I can redress any puny or thoughtless exchanges I may have taken part in. A first account does not have to be a final settlement. I can stay open to a fair claim made reasonably, even if some time has passed. Some understandings are slow to become clear, or to find right expression.

Despite the overwhelming and almost terminal shortage of honest marketplaces, there continues to be a portion of citizens who do not behave in ways that deplete and harm. Such people continue to create goodwill and generosity wherever they can. Such people embrace life-nurturing exchanges with others. They trade in a manner that honours us all.

This is the notion of *Caveat Bona* (Let the exchange be of benefit). Generous people don't just trade, they huggle. They grab hold of opportunities and hug them. They do this to ensure that goodness comes from the transaction.

History shows that it is very hard to create and sustain a democracy, but much simpler to close one down. The same can be said of sustainable and supportive marketplaces. There are people who work hard to destroy goodwill and generosity wherever it starts to prosper, they uggle. They *install ugly* into situations, and they do this with intent. They diminish opportunity and deprive others of their fair share. This is the notion of *Caveat Emptor* (Let the buyer beware).

It's easy to tell the difference between hugglies and uglies. Hugglies want each party to a transaction to benefit from the exchange. Uglies resent any transaction that doesn't give them more than they earned or paid for.

When uninformed and unobservant people transact in a *caveat emptor* marketplace the tensions and stresses cause struggle and despair. Even when they know that things are not right they can't see any way out. There is no concept of *caveat bona* evident. The consumer/customer feels ripped off, and any redress which the consumer might reasonably expect from the government rarely translates into satisfactory resolution.

Generosity and goodwill follows action that is mindful of purpose. Transactions can be balanced for the individual good of both parties, which then flows to the general good. Generosity is different to kindness. Generosity generates. When each party gives with a consciousness of equity and awareness of the personal situation of the other party, the transaction is of mutual benefit.

Once a practice of mutual benefit is installed into transactions, the parties can focus on mutual enrichment. When we take part in huggley transactions we create a paradigm benefit.

Hugglies work with good measure, to arrive at fairness. Working for good measure calls for good tools, and appropriate training in the use of them – skills such as recognising the difference between commerce and capitalism. The Buddhist concept of right livelihood can be helpful here – when being producer or recipient; giver or receiver, or both giver and receiver.

Hugglies cultivate opportunity, invite participation, and generate benefit whenever and wherever they can. They do not wait for the world to come to them. They feel no need to lure, seduce, or mock the other party.

Informed people can create marketplaces which generate social and material wellbeing. A marketplace is not limited to a physical domain.

Marketing means you put yourself into the best position for beneficial transaction to happen, so it follows that a marketplace is wherever two people pause to exchange something – from a friendly chat to any number of useful items or services.

It is healthy to balance the accounts for two reasons – to confirm fair exchange and to confirm reciprocal investment.

It is healthy to reclaim root meanings of some words. These “Three R’s” help as a framework:

- Retaliation – *tally up the numbers several times*. This does not mean vengeance or punishment.
- Retribution – *top up when and where necessary*. Give tribute when and where it is called for. Yes, it means getting even, but does not imply eye for an eye or tooth for a tooth, but more of the “do unto others” stuff.
- Reconciliation – *make sure the outcome is a comfortable one*. This can lead to peace. It does not mean accommodating a position decreed by someone else, nor does it mean accepting less than a fair outcome.

All relationships benefit from ritual tidy-ups anchored into time. This can be weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual. It requires honest, confident and frank exchange of information about gains and short-falls, about treatment of each other, about trades made in good faith that didn’t work out.

Keeping friends and customers is much more beneficial than having to find new ones.

The present-day green economy continues to be a paradigm of loss so long as claims are printed with green ink and sentimental words. Consumer Protection controls are often loosely applied. Entrepreneurs rush to production, and legal loopholes protect them from their mistakes. They are not forced to redress the harm done.

When I claim that some people prefer to steward value – by steward I mean to mind it and to make it available to others as well as themselves – then how can my claim be tested?

I test my claim as I gain better understanding of my own ability to steward what I value.

Every time I find myself in a quandary I am being presented with an opportunity to huggle. I can calm down and consider exactly what qualms I am having. I can consider the scary bits, the caring bits, the duty bits.

Each of us is susceptible to many fears and challenges, but clearly there are lines of responsibility to others, whether friend or stranger, and I have a duty of care about what I am doing and how it might impact on others and on the earth that supports me.

I can draw a line to a not-lose, not-lose outcome, and work up from there.

Every time I find myself tempted to fudge or hide, to fail to disclose, to deny involvement in acts that are not generous I am being presented with a situation that is disjunctive. I must pause before selecting my path forward.

If I do not expect uglies to change their ways, because they lack conscience about how they treat me, and they thrive on the loss and pain of others, then I have to develop my own immunity to such people.

Transparency is a commitment to others when involved with me. To be transparent is to be known and understood so that my behaviours and transactions are clear. An interested observer can benchmark their own susceptibilities through observing mine. Others can use this visible and known behaviour as a benchmark when deciding to be involved with me.

Constant and continuous observation of such visible and known behaviour builds a trustworthy basis for relationship. I come to know track records of those I transact with, their current

activities become clear, and the constancy of interaction becomes a road map for solid relationships.

Trust builds on successful transaction.

It follows that observation can reveal irregularity, inconsistency, disjunctive slips, and treatment that diminishes others. This becomes a roadmap for predictable mistreatment if I were to involve myself with such people. There is no shortage of material on the behaviours of bullies, psychopaths and cults.

We owe it to ourselves to become strong against such predators.

By installing habits that detect dishonesty and locate dysfunction, it becomes possible to build a body of evidence that supports my own practice of community development. When this self-styled practice is built step by step, success by success, by individuals working in small groups, then the benefits expand through the principles of generosity.

At the same time the likelihood of the group being wrecked by uglies is reduced. When we learn to refuse to take part in behaviour that harms others, we develop increased immunity to the wiles that lure, seduce and entrap others.

It follows that we are often in a position to help others who are less immune and more vulnerable.

The predatory marketplace needs to manufacture circumstances that attract transactions. In order to do this, it constructs apparent scarcity linked to deficiency of opportunity. It can ignore a few people who voice dissent and who expose unethical corporate behaviour, especially those with little money or power.

What the predatory marketplace cannot ignore is a visible bypass of its merchant role that renders its position optional.

The predatory marketplace is threatened by good examples – as articulated by Noam Chomsky and others. The successful bypass of the merchant role by more than a small section of consumers will bring unexpected reactions. This much is predictable. An angry person looks for an external target for his or her rage. An angry system reacts in the same way.

The status quo is a powerful beast. Your success exposes inadequacy or dishonesty in social systems surrounding you. Existing power webs that occupy social systems react to perceived threat.

- Social relationships based on power are threatened.
- Commercial relationships based on power are threatened.
- Financial/Economic relationships based on power are threatened.

That which is success for you can be loss of opportunity for someone caught up in a scarcity paradigm. There are people who will hate you for disturbing them. Threatened people look for targets. A campaign of punitive education commences. Best learn quickly.

Challenge is predictable. You will benefit from pre-emptive defensive mechanisms installed in your organising model, and skills to cope with threats. In many cases, the responses to the upset you caused are reasonable, and the disturbed person or group can be negotiated with. Processes can be learned that will buffer against opposition and conflict.

If a small group of mutualists can succeed in bringing about a better life for its members, other individuals and small groups who are caught in the grip of disadvantage will ask “If they can, why can’t we?” The process of social change starts if they move to emulate your success.

Vindictive retaliation, while painful and costly, is predictable. Individuals who upset prevailing relationships and destabilise existing structures need knowledge, protection, and sanctuary. Friendships and support systems can fail you when you need them most. It is best to have a diverse range of support systems and a reliable group of colleagues so that you have back-up.

It has been my experience that the flash-point for opposition rests at the intersection between loose aggregations of people operating as a movement, and the formal congregation of people operating as a structure.

Movements are part of “we the people” in society. As soon as you register as a structure with the state, your organisation is part of the state. Mutualists can make significant improvements in their lives long before they might need to register a structure with the government.

I believe that the ability to change our world starts with us and radiates outwards. When we change ourselves we close off destructive disjunctions that grew from wounding experiences in our past. I needed to move to where my thinking patterns (reasonably strong) were more in charge of my daily life than my emotional patterns (crippled). I had a vision of the world that I wished to function in.

I worked out that my dreams (of land and freedom) would never come to reality until I set out plans (for land and freedom). I worked out that how I felt affected what I did, and I came to recognise that I could be more selective about who I associated with, who I was willing to work with, and how I went about that work. If I did this I would get more opportunities to develop what I wanted.

In 1992, as a mutualist searching for others who might see the world as I did, I wrote: *And what if a group of friends start to work consciously to bring themselves to balance, to help each other in coming to balance, and to work consciously, creatively and joyously to improve their lifestyles – without oppressing others?*

As a mutualist with twenty years more experience, I can say this: *The self-ruling small group needs to proceed slowly and carefully to develop identity, purpose, scope and scale of activity. Three steps forward and two steps back is waste of four steps.*

Trust-worthy is different to popular. A popular person cannot be assumed to be trust-worthy.

All individuals you consider working with can be measured against benchmarks that are legitimate, that have been established by experience, and validated by the personal experiences of others. It is no longer possible to rely on, or to accept, that “reputation” is trust-worthy.

The members of a small mutualist group will measure their own transaction for fairness, for decency and for links to purpose with the same degree of stringency that they use when measuring others.

Some test questions:

- In what way does what we are about to do move us both towards our goals – yours and mine.
- Is this fair, is it the right thing to do, does it match our stated purpose?
- Who else in the small group will be affected by this transaction?

- Are we showing care, concern and consideration for those affected?

Mutual enrichment rises from a process of tapping each other's skills without ripping each other off.

"The nation-state offers most of its members a stronger sense of security, belonging, or affiliation, and even personal identity, than does any alternative large group".²

Does this statement resonate for you? Can you agree with it?

What if you don't feel that you are part of the "most" or that your sense of "affiliation" comes and goes? I assume that if the levels of disaffection and disaffiliation from Queensland Inc. make it impossible for you to live here, you will be planning to seek residency elsewhere.

Wherever you live, except in lawless areas of failed states, you have to accept that The State exists to manage the geographical area within its boundaries, and to administer to the needs of the population. The mechanisms of state government set limits and draw lines around and through your life – but you are not The State, and The State is not you.

I choose to live in Queensland, and I accept that every *large group* has hierarchies of function [social institutions] and that every *large group* develops circles of support [movements and alliances]. All States in Australia differ in many aspects, and there is usually quite a lot of room to move around any problem.

Within your small group, you will be seeking interaction and transaction that is mutually beneficial and of fair value, reciprocal in nature, with no misgivings by either party for having taken part in the exchange. You will accumulate sufficient for a practical life, without greed or hoarding.

A mutualist lifestyle is portable and I believe that every *large group* will have mutualists within it. The challenge is to find them.

I have come to understand that the term *pro bono* means giving, not always for free, but always for the general good, including that of the giver.

Caveat Bona – let the exchange be of benefit. *Caveat bona* goes beyond *pro bono* to mean that the giver insists that the transaction ensures benefit for all concerned.

On which side of the plus-minus line will your next transaction lie?

² Karl Deutch in "After the Nation State – Citizens, Tribalism, and the New World Disorder" Horseman and Marshall.

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