

Whose Crisis, Whose Future? Susan George, 2010

Political scientist and social justice activist Susan George explains in this book how the world's human society is run by the rich and for the rich—a reality that conflicts with almost everyone's sense of fairness and hinders the cooperation that is necessary for constructive change. The neo-liberal ideology of deregulation, free trade, minimum government interference, and globalization has been successfully sold to the public as the road to freedom and wealth for everyone, but after 40 years it has led instead to increased concentration of wealth, more poverty, more hunger and to an impoverished natural resource base—depleted farmland, forests, fish, minerals, fresh water and a climate that makes things worse. Democracy and freedom have suffered, too: the lives of a majority of humanity are severely limited by the financial system, inequality, lack of food and water, lack of work and violent conflicts within and between nations.

George helps us understand what the banks and financiers have been up to—basically, short term gambling with no risk to themselves since the government picks up the tab — and how the economic crisis of 2008 as well as earlier crises came about as a natural result of the almost total deregulation of the finance industry through heavy lobbying. The industry is still not regulated (2011) so more trouble can be expected.

George shows how the neo-liberal policies of the IMF, World Bank and major funding nations led not to development in the South but in actual fact to greater indebtedness and greater inequality in many countries. The green revolution of the 1970's concentrated more land in the hands of the few, creating an impoverished, unemployed, and, for all practical purposes, totally dependent class of landless poor. Further, privatization of water has led to poor service and poorer health for those who cannot pay.

The chapter on conflict highlights scarce resources and explains how both climate change and growing population increase risk of conflicts. Susan George suggests three powerful, interrelated directions to reduce conflicts: 1) an end to dependency on fossil fuels, 2) stabilizing the population and 3) empowering and educating women (all three easier said than done, but certainly powerful).

In a way, this book is about poor human relations. George emphasizes that our only hope is in cooperation based on fair relations—not dominance and competition. To overcome the vested interests that hinder change today, George believes that progressive movements must come together, cooperate and create a united front.

Susan George's purpose is to show us how—or at least point the way—we can change the world order to run democratically “by the people and for the people”, with priorities in their proper order: nature first, since it provides us with the resources for life, our society second (without which no human can survive), the economy third, to provide the basic needs of humans, and lastly, the financial system, to *serve* the economy. Currently the financial system *runs* the economy, which runs the society, which is gradually destroying our resource base and natural capital!

George says her book is not about revolution nor the end of capitalism (despite its many misuses) but rather about “an ongoing process of transformation fuelled by constant public pressure...that forces governments to rein in the private sector...and put people and the planet ahead of accumulation and profit in a far more cooperative social context”. After all, she says, “We could enjoy a world that is clean, green and rich, providing a decent and dignified life for everyone on a healthy planet”.

Archie Duncanson, August 2011

Citations from Whose Crisis, Whose Future:

“If we put an end to dependency on fossil fuels...we would eliminate a major cause of war in our time.” p 167

“...a stable population would be another major contribution to a stable world.” p 168

“This is what global warming promises to transform: personal safety and health, access to food, water and medicine, geopolitical and strategic balance, social cohesion and peace itself. This being the case, can we please stop talking about ‘future generations’? We are talking about our own generation, right here and right now.” p 180

“We have seen how huge inequalities...encourage conflict which in our day can mean terrorism—the poor person’s weapon of choice” p 195

“Water is big business.” p 152