

## A Call To Action

We of The Fourth World are delighted with the ready concern for the global crisis expressed in '*A Call To Action*' initiated by Positive News, especially since we have been calling for such a move now for several years.

We need to note there has been an enormous shift in global consciousness over recent decades, stimulated in large part by the sheer wanton savagery of the suicidal assaults on the environment emanating from globalised capitalism. Another factor has seen the world-wide eruption of ethnic, tribal and small-nation assertiveness following the demise of colonialism. This is surely *the* revolution of our times, it is happening under our noses and yet it still scarcely impinges on the radical consciousness. Yet another stimulus has been the theoretical work of the late Leopold Kohr and Fritz Schumacher, among others, with their emphasis on the factor of *scale* as the key to the modern crisis.

There is of course an interlocking factor here which relates to power: power in the hands of giant corporations and subject, if at all, to only vestigial democratic remit, power in the hands of increasingly centralised and unresponsive political forces, power out of control, power running amok, power concerned only with self-aggrandisement regardless of any effect on the environment, on resources, on economic justice, on social structures or on peoples lives.

The nine-point programme of the '*Call To Action*' refers only marginally to this factor. Ought it not to be at the top of the agenda, instead of being alluded to inferentially on some of the points listed?

Let us be clear that the global crisis and all its horrendous manifestations springs from this crisis of power; power people do not have, power which, if it is in democratic hands, can only be deployed by a deliberate rejection of mass organisations, even when these are established for ostensibly reformist objectives, and an insistence it shall only be deployed on a small, human scale in the neighbourhoods where real people actually live if their voice, their aspirations and their moral judgements are able to resonate through the entire political, economic and social process.

The same power cannot be in two places at the same time; what is dominant today is power people do not have, and which on a mass basis cannot have, (or are there still among us those who persist despite the evidence in believing that the present centralised mass political pattern represents a feasible framework within which the deep-rooted transformations we need can be effected?);<sup>1</sup> power which is being abused to a degree that is imperilling the entire adventure of civilisation and power beyond any possibility of control by ordinary people as it rampages regardless across the globe to their detriment.

I fear any '*Call To Action*' which fails to give adequate heed to the imperatives for action arising from this overriding factor, however nobly inspired, however massively backed by concerned people and however legitimate and pressing the points in the programme may be, can only run into its own quicksands, such as has been the fate of so many radical innovations throughout history. A call to

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<sup>1</sup> The question of the effectiveness of mass political parties as a means of expressing the intentions and the wishes of their members is analysed in the present writer's *Small Is Powerful - The Future As If People Really Mattered* (especially chapter 9), published 1995 by Adamantine Press, of which a German edition is also available. And also in his *New Politics*, published 1982 by Garlandfold Ltd. & Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi. It has also been a recurrent theme of FOURTH WORLD magazines since the founding of RESURGENCE in 1966, and of FOURTH WORLD REVIEW founded in 1984. Copies of the latter are available from 26 The High Street, Purton, Wiltshire SN5 4AE, UK; Tel: 01793 772214; e-mail [john.papworth@btinternet.com](mailto:john.papworth@btinternet.com) and can also be downloaded from the FOURTH WORLD website at [www.cesc.net/fourthworld](http://www.cesc.net/fourthworld).

action to effect social change presupposes a reasoned explanation of why such action is necessary, as well as involving an analysis of the defects which have provoked it, to say nothing of the need to project an alternative social structure where such defects cease to prevail.

In short, it needs to affirm clearly for what purposes the action is being called. The 'call' in any case makes no reference to the extent to which the U.K. government is cutting the ground from under radical feet by making moves to abolish local parish councils, nor does it dedicate one jot of attention to the malignant contemporary evil of commercial T.V. and its impetus to destroy any decent degree of social consciousness within which any 'call for action' might stand the least chance of resonating. What 'action' is contemplated here?

In partnership with *The Ecologist* we of *The Fourth World* recently held a *Radical Consultation*. Our concern and our focus was precisely on this question of power. One of the several initiatives it engendered was a proposal for 'Crisis Committees' to be established in every neighbourhood across the world, Committees of concerned local people whose members were to seek to locate the causes of the crisis and how they should respond to it. We realised fully that this could not be an instant solution, that it would need to proceed gradually, as any organic response must if it is to be soundly based and to become effective. We find it a matter of regret that this initiative finds no place in the nine-point aforementioned programme.

If, as Thomas Berry says, we are at a defining moment in history, it is a point suggesting that we need to exercise the utmost care in defining our own response to it. Is this likely to be yet another global get together of the great and the good who can afford to jet across the world, where resounding speeches will be heard to denounce all the evils that now press upon us, which extol, as do these nine points, so many of the things which need urgently to be done and where proposals for action centre on yet more mass demonstrations of protest, more meetings here, there and everywhere and perhaps the setting up of yet another mass organisation, whilst leaving the vital question untouched of transforming mass power structures so that power really and truly is in peoples' hands in the only way it can be, in their own localities, and so everyone returns to base with a bogus sense of accomplishment? Hot air does of course have a number of useful applications, but it is not generally deemed to be an adequate means of social transformation.

I am asking in a spirit not of contention but of urgency. The forces of evil are rampant because we have yet to devise effective means of subjecting them to a realistic degree of democratic control. If we continue to award subsidiary concern to the wisdom and the insights of such thinkers as Leopold Kohr and Fritz Schumacher and the immense groundwork they succeeded in establishing we shall only ensure that this defining moment in history will become another defining moment of radical ineffectuality.

Any *Call To Action*, complete with an outline programme, if it is to achieve a general consensus of concurrence by the numerous founts of concern engendered by the global crisis, needs surely to be preceded by full, open, frank and amicable discussion on the main lines of approach to ensure they reflect as wide a spectrum of view as possible. Let the debate proceed!

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