



*Discussion Guide*

*YES! Fall 2002*

## **Welcome to the *YES!* Discussion Guide Series**

*We're delighted that you've decided to take up some of the issues explored in YES! magazine in your class or discussion group. When people gather in groups to talk with mutual respect and caring about the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change. The staff of YES! magazine has prepared this guide to help you get started. We hope you'll find it useful.*

*We've posted selected articles from YES! on our website at [www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org). You're welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 1-800-937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.*

### **Living Economies**

While the stock market was daily reaching new heights and Americans in droves were investing in the boom, few questioned our culture's turn toward consumerism, corporatism, and division between haves and have nots. But now, as corporate scandal follows corporate scandal and the stock market heads ever downward, dragging ordinary folks' retirement savings with it, there is a historic opportunity to reconsider our economy's course. Congressional debates on accounting standards ring flat. They don't begin to address the American people's sense that something has gone fundamentally wrong.

What might fundamental change look like? If our corporate economy has gone down a suicide path, what would a living economy look like? In this issue of YES! we invite you to consider stories that show what an economy that serves living communities might look like. We encourage you to read the following articles to prepare for a discussion of this issue:

David C. Korten, "Economies for Life," 13-17

Anthony Flaccavento, "From the Earth, Up," 25-27

Michael Hudson, "It Shall Be a Jubilee Unto You," 38-39

Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé, "Of Land and Hope," 40-42

Sarah Ruth van Gelder, "Twelve Things to Do Now About Corporations," 44

#### **Turning Away From the Suicide Economy**

"Rule by global corporations and financial speculators engaged in the single-minded pursuit of money is destroying communities, cultures, and natural systems everywhere on the planet," David Korten explains. But this suicide economy, in which the wealthy few monopolize the planet's resources, is not the only possibility. We could have living economies based on local businesses, both for-profit and nonprofit, owned by people who have direct stakes in the impacts the businesses create, giving them an incentive to make their impacts positive. Our lives could be dramatically different if they were dominated not by unaccountable mega-conglomerates, but shaped to create real wealth for ourselves and those around us.



Where might you start creating these economies? What percentage of your spending, investing, and time could you shift to the living economy? What helps make that possible? What makes that difficult?

Which local businesses already exist that are trying to pay living wages, practice sustainability, and foster community? How might you participate in efforts to support these businesses?

What economic and political decisions can you make to shift toward a local living economy and withdraw resources from the suicide economy?

### **Sustaining a Region**

Appalachia has been exploited by resource-extractive industry for centuries. But with tobacco farming in decline and timber and mining companies downsizing and exporting jobs, the region needed alternatives. Appalachian Sustainable Development has been working to pull the many elements of a new economy together—organic farmers, local supermarkets to sell the produce, a local label to alert customers of what produce is local and organic, a kitchen incubator to create value-added products made from local produce, and a sustainable forestry program.

What are the economic actors in your region that you'd like to see phased out or transformed? What might take their places?

What resources are available to you to be drawn into a local, sustainable economy with living wage jobs? What strengths exist in your community? How might they be supported and linked? What is missing from your region and how might it be supplied?

How might the economy of your region rely on the qualities of its land and ecosystems? What would it take for there to be livelihoods available that tapped the creativity, interests, and strengths of your community? What would it take to make these livelihoods rewarding?

### **Creating a Jubilee**

Economic inequality arises in nearly every culture and once there it tends to widen, leading to political inequality. The Mosaic and pre-Mosaic tradition dealt with this problem through the Jubilee—every 50 years, debts were canceled, land returned to its original owners, and debt slaves freed—based on the notion that a society cannot persist when inequality grows too wide. Our own culture is now faced with dramatically widening inequality that allows tremendous political access to the few while disenfranchising and disheartening the many and undermining the legitimacy of government.

What elements of the ancient tradition of the Jubilee might be resurrected now? Consider Enron's bankruptcy, as well as the growing number of bankruptcies among ordinary Americans, and the debt of the Third World. When and how should debts be written off?

How might we reconceive the ownership of land if we held to the Mosaic notion that “the land belongs to the Lord and you are only strangers and guests”?

In the passage inscribed on the Liberty Bell calling on us to “proclaim liberty throughout the land,” the word translated as “liberty” is *deror*, which refers to the liberation of debt slaves. What would it mean for us to conceive liberty as including freedom from debt and from extreme inequality?

### **Regaining Land—and Democracy**

Despite Brazil's rank among the world's highest 10 GNPs and status as a major food exporter, tens of thousands of its people are hungry and impoverished. But after military rule ended in 1986, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) began pressing for transfer of land to the landless, pushing the new government for democracy, and creating new communities around cooperative principles and small farms. The poor not only gained land and sustenance, but a sense of themselves as powerful citizens. Instead of agribusiness growing crops for exports, the MST envisions an economy built by self-organizing communities growing their own food.

How did the MST help the poor begin to believe they could transform Brazil? In what way is the MST approach like or unlike social service group and activist groups that you know of?



Like Brazil, the US has an enormous GNP and produces tremendous quantities of food, yet there are hungry people here too. What lessons for the US can be drawn from the MST's struggle?

The Lappés argue that hunger is caused not by scarcity but by inequality and that a lot of food is exported from countries where there is hunger to rich countries. What does that information imply for those of us living in the US? How might it affect policy, both internationally and within the US?

What do you think of MST founder João Pedro's claim that to stop believing that the status quo cannot be changed is to lose naïve consciousness?

### Proposing Real Reform

Sarah van Gelder makes 12 suggestions of things we the people could do now to reform corporations truly, in order to restore democracy, the environment, and communities.

What might you want to add to that list? One of the challenges of getting the accountability we are looking for from corporations is that they are currently so powerful. Yet the current round of scandals is creating an unusual opportunity for people to look critically at the power that corporations now have in our cultural, political, and social lives. How might that beginning awareness deepen into dialogue and action? What actions can you take as an individual or a participant in a political movement?

How have corporations affected life for you or your community? Have you had experiences of elements of a local living economy being created or restored? What worked for you? What didn't? What actions can you take as an individual or a participant in a political movement to restore your own community?

*We welcome feedback on your experience in using our discussion guides. Email comments to DiscussionGuides@futurenet.org*

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