

Dr. E F Schumacher, economist and author of the world-famous book ***Small is Beautiful***, died last week, shortly after addressing the MRA Industrial Conference in Caux. We print here extracts from this, his last, public expression of his philosophy.

A writer in The Times noted, “he combined scientific thinking at its most vigorous with religious commitment at its most compassionate”. Barbara Ward wrote in the same paper, “To very few people, it is given to begin to change, drastically and creatively, the direction of human thought. Dr Schumacher belongs to this intensely creative minority and his death is an incalculable loss to the whole international community”.

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CARING, FOR REAL

Let me say first of all how happy and grateful I am to be here on my first visit to Caux.

I had some difficulty in getting here by air. At London airport there was an announcement that the flight would be delayed. But we were invited to go to the restaurant and have a little meal. I went there and noted at the next table a family sitting down, father, mother and little boy, probably aged eight or nine. The waitress came, and the little boy said, “I want spaghetti”, but father was still studying the menu, and then ordered three Yorkshire pudding and pies. And you should have seen the little boy looking at his mother. His eyes nearly fell out and he said, “Mummy, she thinks I am real”.

The first thing when we think about what we call the Third World or the developing, or to put it more simply about the poor, the first thing we ought to realize, is that they are real. They are actually people, as real as you and me, except that they can do things which you and I can't do.

They have a know-how that we don't have. They are real, and we must not think of them as poor little souls, and luckily we come along and

we are going to develop them.

No, they are survival artists and it is quite certain that if there should be a real resources crisis, a real ecological crisis, or this, that or the other crisis in the world, these people will survive. Whether you or I will survive is much more doubtful. India will survive, though whether Bombay will survive is more doubtful. That New York will survive is an impossibility. Probably the same applies for London or Tokyo. And an awful number of other big cities.

You cannot help a person if you yourself don't understand how that person manages to exist at all.

Overseas development aid is a process where you collect money from the poor people in the rich countries, to give to the rich people in the poor countries. Nobody CARING FOR REAL by EF Schumacher intended this, but there was a blindness about this pattern of living which enables the poor to survive. And so we offered our goods, which of course only people already rich and powerful could take.

Then I went to southern India. I was a lucky person, because the right question occurred to my mind. Everything begins with a question, and the right question was, "What sort of technology would be appropriate for rural India?" Surely not the technology of Pittsburgh, of Sheffield, or of Dortmund or of Tokyo.

Fate has given me the name of a shoemaker. If you want to be a good shoemaker, it is not good enough to make good shoes, and to know all about making good shoes. You also have to know a lot about feet. Because the aim of the shoe is to fit the foot. But most of us never thought about this.

All the same size

There used to be a story about a country that unduly indulged in central planning. They developed the finest boot the world has ever seen and they ordered 500 million pairs of this boot, all the same size. That is what we tend to do. Because we don't really think of the poor

being real. We think that we have the answer.

When I asked myself this question, ‘What would be the appropriate technology for rural India or rural Latin America or maybe the city slums? I came to a very simple provisional answer. That technology would indeed be really much more intelligent, efficient, scientific if you like, than the very low level technology employed. But it should be very, very much simpler, very much cheaper, very much easier to maintain, than the highly sophisticated technology of the modern West. In other words it would be an intermediate technology, somewhere in between.

Then I asked myself another question: ‘Why do they not use an intermediate technology? Why do they not use boots that fit their feet?’ And then I realized that intermediate technology was not to be found. I realized that in terms of available technology, either it was very, very low or it was very, very high, the middle had disappeared. I therefore came to the conclusion that there was a tendency in technology development which I called ‘the law of the disappearing middle’. The middle way, the balance – this is also the democratic way where even the little people have a chance of a degree of independence and what the young call ‘doing one’s own thing’ – that is being destroyed. And therefore we have throughout the world this atmosphere of tension, even hatred.

Multi-national companies do their business. It is not them. But the whole of society is stumbling along led by engineers and scientists who then introduce another complication, and another speeding up. That is their job. But we as a society have not got enough philosophy or humanity to call a stop when a stop is indicated. Or at least to try and counterbalance it.

People matter

We all know that the human being has a marvelous fortitude in tolerating the suffering of others.

We have not got an appropriate technology from a human point of

view. The subtitle of my book *Small is Beautiful* was *Economics as if people mattered*. We do not approach economics primarily from the point of view of people, we approach it from the point of view of the production of goods, if they become redundant, well we have to pay them redundancy pay. If they have no opportunity of using their skills, then we have to re-train them. If the work is so noisy that they lose their hearing, well then, we have to put something around their ears. They are means of production. And this is the kind of industry we are now carrying into the so-called developing countries. We are doing it at a time when we in our hearts know that this kind of industry has no future. Nature cannot stand it, and the human being cannot stand it. Already more than half of all the hospital beds in Britain and the United States are occupied by people who do not really have a physical ailment but who are mad. It has no future.

When we begin to suspect that we are not on the right road, then of course we get a lot of radicals, fanatics. And a fanatic is a person who, when he senses that he is doing the wrong thing, redoubles his efforts. We have plenty of those. I call them 'the people of the forward stampede'. They have a slogan, emblazoned on their banner, 'A breakthrough a day keeps the crisis away'. They are stampeding us into greater and greater violence. More and more mad-hat schemes.

But now there is another great groundswell of people whom I call 'the homecomers', who say, 'The purpose of our existence on this earth cannot be to destroy it. The purpose of our existence can't be to work ourselves silly and to end up in a lunatic asylum. Let's reconsider.'

I was on the other side of the iron curtain, where they explained to me at great length that their system was so much better than our system. Finally they said, 'In any case the Western economies are like an express train hurtling at ever-increasing speed towards an abyss.' Then there was a short pause, and they said, 'But we shall overtake you.' That is the automatism of progress.

Fateful polarization

We set up an organization, which we called the Intermediate

Technology Development Group Ltd. It is still very limited. Not to kill off the high technology, because we couldn't do that anyhow, but to fill this gap, this middle that has disappeared. And perhaps, thereby, to overcome the fateful polarization, which technology has produced. Not everybody is better off; the rich become richer, and the poor become more desperate, and society disintegrates, something that you can observe on a world-scale, and you can observe it in all big countries.

You can keep things plastered over only with enormous welfare expenditure. Welfare will keep people afloat, but does not integrate them into society. In the United States, for example, you have many people who are third generation welfare recipients. Even the great United States has come to the conclusion that with the present, easily available technology, we cannot solve the problem. So they have set up a national center for appropriate technology (?), not for the developing countries, but for the United States. They said we must rethink technology and try to make it appropriate to our actual problems and these problems are simply not more and more production. The actual problems are the re-integration of a sizeable proportion of the total population into the mainstream of society. Similar things are happening in all advanced countries. So now we are in the position of talking about appropriate or intermediate technology in a much more convincing way. When people in the Third World say to me, 'If it is such a good thing, why don't you do it?' I say 'We do do it.'

Modern technology has become increasingly violent. It is employing violent means. In agriculture we scatter around very violent chemicals, we call them pesticides and herbicides, which means killer substances. On this thin living film of the earth on which all life depends, we are scattering millions of tons of killer substances. Whatever you may think, it is a violent technology.

Violent technology

There is a readiness to apply extremely violent processes to that sacred and unbelievably complex ecological system called nature. We don't know what we are doing. Of course we have wonderful

scientists, who give us the assurance that all is well. It is a matter of the blind leading the blind. It is not necessary to be violent. We already have in agriculture, in medicine, in energy, in any other subject you may care to think of, people who are very often called, or used to be called cranks. Who know how to produce enough food, how to keep healthy, without any violent methods. They also normally turn out to be particularly pleasant people.

Even the most wonderfully designed ocean steamer carries life-boats, not because some statistician has predicted that the steamer will run into an iceberg, but because icebergs have occasionally been seen. Isn't it time that the modern world provided some lifeboat? Of course you don't put all your research and development into the exploration of small, simple and non-violent technology. If a big business comes and says, 'I will give this thinking a chance,' they have never felt sorry. They suddenly realized that really the construction of the universe is far more benign than they ever thought. You don't have to be so violent. We are now quite intelligent enough to create appropriate technologies, if we really think before we act, and think in these wider terms.

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