

Book Review

Free, Equal and Mutual: Rebalancing Society for the Common Good

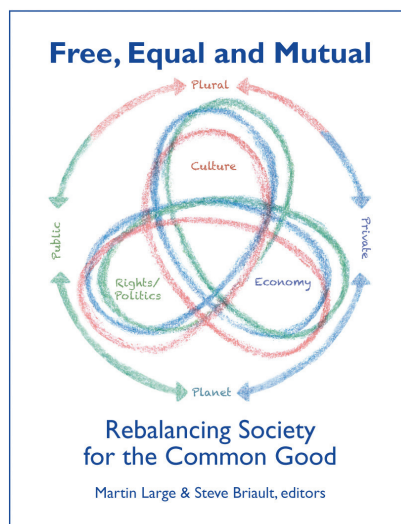
Edited by Martin Large and Steve Briault, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, 2018, 275pp,
price (paperback) £20, ISBN 978-1-907359-94-1

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In reading this book we must first put into context the era in which Rudolf Steiner formulated his ideas and vision. This of course was prior to the Wall Street crash, the Great Depression and the introduction of Keynesian economics following the Second World War – which was of course dismantled by the neo-liberals from the 1970s onwards.

Rudolf Steiner's vision of a Threefold Society could be interpreted in modern-day language as the genuine representation of Tony Blair's and Bill Clinton's 'Third Way' – by which I mean the real intent on delivering social cohesion between people and the capitalist system, instead of what we know about Blair and Clinton, who pursued the same neo-liberal agenda as Thatcher and Reagan. Threefolding goes into great depths about the sociological impact on people's lives from the effects capitalism has on their well-being, health and standard of living.

To put into context how Steiner was one of the great thinkers of his time, and how many of his ideas still have a great relevance today, we need also to understand that even a matter of decades ago it could not be conceived how important money creation has become. Rudolf Steiner in his own way describes how essential it must be to tame the power and avarice of the capitalist system, which in fact destroys the very foundation it is built on; but in recognizing that, he failed to see that capital itself is only concerned about self-interest. Whilst it is perfectly plausible that some capitalists can see that the pursuit of ever-growing profit against the backdrop of widening income disparity is unsustainable, there is a small, enormously



wealthy elite that refuses to accept any given wisdom on wealth redistribution, and have created institutions whose sole purpose is to generate even greater rents to them. Former US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders spelled this out in 2011 with his speech to Congress, where he stated that 'the 1 per cent were at war with their own people'.

To understand how we have arrived where we are today, between the time of Rudolf Steiner and the birth of neo-liberalism, we have to go back to the Great Depression where the main protagonists were fighting the good fight for people's minds and interests. On the one hand, we had Friedrich Von Hayek defending

the libertarian view of individualism and economic freedom, and on the other John Maynard Keynes, who promoted state intervention and redistribution of wealth. Maynard Keynes won, as the post-war Labour party transformed social society into the most dynamic period in British history which, up to the mid-1970s, has been referred to as the 'Golden Years'.

Thereafter Milton Friedman's version of society and freedom became widely adopted as the new political norm, which we now call neo-liberalism. What I feel Rudolf Steiner failed – perhaps quite understandably – to foresee was how corporate capture could envelop the whole world economy, without people suspecting that it was happening. This of course took careful and patient planning, something capitalists say should happen through a market framework. This planning has evolved since the great debate between Hayek and Keynes, where the elite recognized the threat to their power and rent-seeking

ability, so set about creating the very conditions that contradict the aspirations of Steiner.

Rudolf Steiner understood that a healthy society was a cohesive one. Margaret Thatcher also knew that, but in order to transform Britain into conforming to the new world order, she declared 'that there was no such thing as society', and from 1979 onwards set about dismantling the whole fabric of British society.

Free, Equal and Mutual offers a great insight into the failings of a capitalist society, how neo-liberalism has permeated into every level and how Rudolf Steiner's forward thinking could offer a more balanced world for everyone. What I feel he could not have envisaged was how important the state actually is, as witnessed by the bailing out of the banking and financial sector. What he also could never have foreseen is the way in which money now enters the economy, and completely changes the dynamic of how society pays its way. We no longer have to sit around waiting for entrepreneurs or wealthy capitalists to create industries, utilizing our talents to make even more money for them; but the state can itself create those self-same industries for the benefit of people.

People are the wealth creators anyway; it is just that most people do not understand that. Our government does not have to raise taxation in order to spend into the economy, which was not how it was in Rudolf Steiner's day when our currency was on the Gold Standard.

I thought that the American contributors to the book failed to understand how socialism can not be judged by the failure of countries like South America and the East European Communist bloc, all of which operated under siege economic conditions and threats of invasion. In my view, British imperialism has been replaced by the United States, who are responsible for the neo-liberal agenda and who have destabilized the world by fighting in over 152 wars since the Second World War.

In conclusion, this book reminds us all of our humanity, where showing respect for each other – whilst reaching out in collaboration and cooperation – rather than competing, we can build a safer, far more harmonious future for everyone.

Twelve authors draw on Rudolf Steiner's social thinking for re-balancing society:

'Full of concrete, exciting examples.....' - **Nicanor Perlas**, Alternative Nobel prize winner, from the Foreword

Free, Equal and Mutual Published May 2018.

'Shows a way ahead for rebalancing society... for the common good.'

David Drew Ph.D., MP, Shadow Minister for Rural Affairs, UK