Dedicated to the recently-departed, 

Bill Mollison, 

whose echo will be heard for years to come
Tracing Community Economics for Permaculture Practitioners

Permaculture practitioners often focus on the very important aspects of gardening or farming and home economics. Indeed, Ralph Borsodi, one of the original “back to the landers,” focused on the same things, and found them integrally necessary to human freedom and flourishing as well as ecological sustainability. However, Ralph Borsodi was also interested in economy beyond the walls of the home, and out in the wider community. This wider interest in community economics can also be found in the later pages of permaculture founder Bill Mollison’s textbook, *Permaculture, a Designers’ Manual*, as well as in other works. Mollison, however, places much less emphasis on this than he does on ecologically sound and economically lucrative food production.

Throughout my community organizing activities, I have found that permaculture as a gardening project is often limited by human rules and infrastructure, particularly the limited access to property, which keeps many from pursuing more sustainable lifestyles. Tenants don’t have security to invest in their (often uninterested) landlord’s back yard, and smallholders wish they had room for animals. Many fear the idea of getting interest-bearing
loans, or have poor credit. These are issues that need to be addressed if permaculture is to become the norm. Like permaculture, the ideas relating to community economics—the way people could best distribute resources in their communities—are out there, they just haven't taken hold.\textsuperscript{1} Community Economics for Permaculture Practitioners is about the kinds of economic principles and institutions that are most appropriate for achieving the goals of permaculture enthusiasts.

While there is no official doctrine of permaculture economics, there are some common elements which do get mentioned in permaculture literature and which function within permaculture communities. These common elements can be traced to philosophies wide and diverse, and to philosophers of many kinds. However, there are particular philosophers and schools of thought that seem to have originated, or otherwise focus on or display more consistently, these elements, and for this reason they will be a focus of this text. In particular, the views associated with the early American “back to the land” movement will be

\footnotesize{\begin{quote}
Community economics are an important matter relating both to ecological and human wellbeing. They are directly tied to sustainability, because resource use is about energy flows and how people handle them (who gets what?).
\end{quote}}
prominent, such as those of anarchism and Georgism, as passed on by Bolton Hall, the founder of the movement, but especially through Ralph Borsodi, who took after him.

Permaculture and community economics are originally tied together by Bill Mollison himself in his *Introduction to Permaculture* and *Permaculture, a Designers’ Manual*. Bill Mollison, though, has little to say about economics in these texts when compared to his mass of knowledge relating to agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. What he does say, however, provides an insight into some of his influences. For instance, Bill Mollison seems to reflect Borsodi’s decentralism, in “Introduction to Permaculture,” when he says that

> I see no other solution (political, economic) to the problems of mankind than the formation of small responsible communities involved in permaculture and appropriate technology. I believe that the days of centralized power are numbered, and that a re-tribalisation of society is an inevitable, if sometimes painful, process.

Though I have not seen or heard him reference Borsodi directly, it’s difficult for me not to infer from his language of decentralism that Bill Mollison does not also take influence from him. Ralph Borsodi was also a direct influence on E.F. Schumacher, whose project Mollison acknowledges (When Mollison
mentions “appropriate technology” he is referring to a specific school of thought which was founded by E.F. Schumacher, the author of *Small is Beautiful*). Ralph was before the time of permaculture, but Bill Mollison affirms the same kinds of projects that were of interest to him, in his own way, years later. Both Ralph Borsodi and Bill Mollison promote localized and community-controlled economies in their work, centered on humane, liberatory, and environmentally-sound institutions, such as mutual credit systems, credit unions, cooperatives, community land trusts, and more. Many of these institutions already exist and can provide valuable services for their members (others, still, must be built, but in order to be built, the vision must be understood).

Because Bill Mollison has direct interest in the work of E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful* and follower of Ralph Borsodi, and because Ralph Borsodi was one of the original green economists and shares much in common with Bill Mollison—who reflects his ideas but doesn’t seem to say as much about economy himself—, Ralph will serve here as the economist who provides the most insight to permaculture,² and his work will

² It is also worthy to note that Ralph Borsodi’s School of Living teaches and practices both community economics, like
provide us a kind of historical hub or connection point between the homesteading lifestyle now associated with permaculture and the schools of economic thought known as anarchism—particularly in its individualist and mutualist forms—and Georgism. The economic school known as distributism also makes its way into the mix by way of E.F. Schumacher. Other economic and social movements, such as the cooperative and social economy movements, too, are sources of influence on permaculture, but because cooperativism permeates the other movements to a great extent (especially mutualism), it will not be treated as a separate tradition here.

Throughout a decade and a half of study, I have been directly influenced by the economists who influenced Ralph Borsodi, as well as by Borsodi himself, E.F. Schumacher whom he influenced, and Bill Mollison. I present to you the general trend found in the work of these folks, which I believe will be readily apparent to yourself if you look into their work. Many of the specifics they have in common, though they may diverge a bit. I want to be clear that in my introduction of the economics I feel are suited for permaculture practitioners that, even while making mention of Borsodi and his influences, I will not be limiting my presentation to any one thinker.

you will find here, and Bill Mollison’s permaculture.
Instead, I personally feel acquainted enough with the array of thinkers and their work to comprehend a common tradition to pass along in a more general sense. Understand, however, that, in doing so, my intention is not to monopolize permaculture-oriented economics, but to expose permaculture practitioners to the traditions that seem to directly or indirectly permeate permaculture and other “back to the land” movements, especially by way of Ralph Borsodi and his influences. This is not to suggest that they are the only influences useful to permaculture, just that these are folks who have been part of a contiguous and traceable tradition which is readily recognizable to me. This text is not written to establish the approach to community economics, but an approach to community economics built upon a historical basis which is easily related to the goals of permaculture practitioners. This is not an official work of permaculture, but is written to complement it.

**Ralph Borsodi and Decentralism**

Ralph Borsodi was a community economist who is well-known in green and intentional-living circles for having started the community land trust movement, which places land in a community trust and provides inexpensive living space for low-income people. Ralph Borsodi also started a school, The School of Living, which still teaches
If you read Borsodi’s economic work, such as “A Decentralist Manifesto,” you will get a good idea of how Ralph Borsodi wanted things. For Ralph Borsodi, homesteading and community economics were integrally related, in such a way that they had to work with and reinforce one another. Without community economics, as he understood it, homesteading will only be accessible to people who have money, and while that is the case environmental degradation will continue and communities will suffer.

Ralph Borsodi himself was inspired by his father’s friend, Bolton Hall, to learn about economics. Bolton was a Georgist. Aside from Henry George, the founding thinker of Georgism, Bolton Hall was also an admirer of the mutualist and individualist anarchists, including especially the French philosopher, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and the American whom Proudhon influenced, Benjamin Tucker. Naturally, Ralph Borsodi’s economic views were predisposed to two schools of economic thought, Georgism and mutualism. Following after Bolton Hall, he took direct influence from Henry George, the founder of the Georgist philosophy, as well as the mutualist and individualist anarchist economists, such as

permaculture and community economics today, and which is still the trustee for existing community land trusts.

Speaking of Labadie, I am not the first to see the general trend of influence in Borsodi’s work or to write about it. In “We Never Called Him Larry”—Labadie’s biography in “Laurence Labadie, Selected Essays”—James J. Martin tells of the connection between the individualist anarchist, Laurence Labadie, and Ralph Borsodi. While doing so, he demonstrates both a historical chain of thought that can be related to Borsodi and mentions Borsodi’s homesteading activities. A few pages after mentioning Labadie “laboring mightily to bring the Borsodi property, the old School of Living of the 1930s, in Suffern, into the kind of shape he wanted it to be in,” he says that

The content of Laurance Labadie’s literary labors changed considerably beginning in the early ‘50s and extending on for about a decade […] The principal reason for this abrupt change in the emphasis of his work was his early postwar involvement in the affairs and interests of the decentralist impulse, sparked by Ralph Borsodi and especially by his principal lieutenant, Mildred Jensen Loomis, a dynamic and articulate activist whose incredible energy in advancing its ideas and programs was easily the most important factor in the spread of interest in this mode of life in the quarter of a century after the end of World War II.
[...]  

It was during the war that Mrs. Loomis began to emerge as an articulate spokesperson in his cause. 

[...]  

Beginning in 1946 the Borsodi-Loomis efforts began to take shape as the vanguard of a ‘movement,’ and their ideas, activities, and achievements were broadcast in a series of periodicals, The Interpreter, Balanced Living, and later A Way Out. Mrs. Loomis recognized the historical continuity of the ideas dating back to Warren, Spooner, and Tucker which Laurance was mainly responsible for making known to her, and which her contemporaries were re-discovering, sometimes through just practical encounters in the everyday world. But this aspect gave to the homesteading movement an ideological base of a kind, which was incorporated into an already large body of other ideas derived from Borsodi and others. The result was that the School of Living periodicals were remarkable reading experiences, in those days thirty years ago when it seemed as though the welfare-warfare State had become all that Americans might ever know.

James J. Martin then notes that he and Laurance Labadie had paid a visit to Mrs. Loomis and her husband, where Martin was
“immensely impressed by what she and her husband were doing on a deliberately chosen small acreage, utilizing all that could be done by maximization of rational, logical, scientific intelligence.” Sounds like permaculture! Of Laurance Labadie’s purchase of the School of Living, James J. Martin concludes, “That Laurance bought the original Borsodi School of Living property in Suffern and moved there to live in 1950 seemed to have some symbolic significance, though he never tried to do there what the Borsodi family had done 15 to 20 years earlier.” Unfortunate, but Borsodi seems to have been of exceptional character and influence.

It is very clear that, along with Georgism, Ralph Borsodi had strong and direct connections to anarchism and its philosophers, as was made known to Mrs. Loomis by Laurance Labadie. Bill Mollison, however, seems not to fully understand anarchism, or to reject it semantically, but still seems to have picked up on similar values to anarchism, either independently, or directly or indirectly through Borsodi and the influence of the School of Living on the “back to the land” movement (which I consider permaculture to be an extension of). For instance, when asked if permaculture is an anarchist movement, Bill Mollison replies—showing an apparent ignorance of what anarchism is about, while at the same time affirming its values—,
No, anarchy would suggest you’re not cooperating. Permaculture is urging complete cooperation between each other and every other thing, animate and inanimate. You can’t cooperate by knocking something about or bossing it or forcing it to do things. You won’t get cooperation out of a hierarchical system. You get enforced directions from the top, and nothing I know of can run like that. I think the world would function extremely well with millions of little cooperative groups, all in relation to each other.

As anyone familiar with anarchism can clearly see, Bill Mollison rejects anarchy, but not on any legitimate philosophical grounds, as cooperation is one of the most important aspects of anarchist philosophy. He then goes on to suggest the same things that anarchists do (a lack of hierarchy, bossing, force, and top-heaviness; small and relating cooperative groups). A cursory look at the economic views of Ralph Borsodi, and an excavation of his influences, demonstrates that Ralph Borsodi took great influence from the individualist anarchists. Bill Mollison’s support of the same kinds of institutions that anarchists advocate (like alternative currency and cooperatives) seems to place him close in relation to the tradition, even if he would argue about the use of the word (this wouldn’t be the first philosophical split over the use of the word “anarchy”). In absence of an influence from anarchism, Georgism, or Borsodi’s
decentralism, or even E.F. Schumacher’s distributism, Bill Mollison does not make clear an allegiance to, or history with, any particular tradition or “ism.” Borsodi’s influences are much clearer, as are E.F. Schumacher’s, which included a healthy dose of Catholic distributism. Permaculture circles seem to have an outlook which is liberatory, and which wishes to move beyond the ideological polarity of communism and capitalism. Georgism, mutualism, and distributism are exemplary of this outlook.

**Georgism, Mutualism, and Distributism**

Georgists wish to hold the Earth as common property and share in its abundance. Georgists are often called “Single-Taxers,” because they wish for only the land to be taxed, and only that land which faces competition for its use. Land that was not strongly desired by anyone else for use could be used for free. The taxes from the desirable land would be used to fund public infrastructure or would be split evenly between the citizens as a dividend. Ralph Borsodi described it this way:

> All the natural resources of the earth — the land, the forests, the oil, the minerals and the waters — are the gift of
nature, or Nature’s God to nil humankind. No title to absolute ownership of any part of the Earth can be traced back to a deed issued by the creator of the Earth. All natural resources are by their nature trusterty, not property. Land should be privately possessed (not owned to buy and sell) to be used for incentive to its fullest and most efficient use. But the unearned increment (the ground rent and the mineral royalties) instead of being privately appropriated, should be used instead of taxes to pay for the necessary services provided by the community.

Mutualists and individualist anarchists often overlap economically, with the main difference being mutualists favoring cooperative ownership, and individualists favoring independent contractors. These anarchists encouraged common people to form freely competing and usually cooperative or mutual banks that would make money more available for making exchanges. They believed that these banks, which would create their own money and lend it without interest, would enable everyone to own productive capital (property, other than land, that is used to produce commodities for sale). The mutualists believed that cooperatives would result in great abundance. Borsodi says,

Government control and regulation of banks — private, commercial and mutual — must be ended. Banks should be free to
provide credit as needed by all legitimate borrowers. The natural monopoly of issue of legal tender currency should be restricted to cooperatively-organized reserve banks. Banking is a profession, not a business; banks which create credit and issue money should be cooperative, and not commercial enterprises.

As you can see, Ralph Borsodi held to both Georgism and mutualism, and this can be acknowledged throughout his manifesto. These constitute the historical foundations for the community economics that I feel best complement permaculture, as these were influential on Ralph Borsodi (as well as Bolton Hall) and seem to be his choice for achieving the ends of self-sufficient but cooperative homesteaders.

Another school of economic thought of interest to permies, in complement to mutualism and Georgism, is distributism, which postulates that a society composed of small-holding families would be best, working according to the principle of subsidiarity, that problems are best left solved by the smallest or most immediate actor capable of solving them. This school was founded by G.K. Chesterton and Hillaire Belloc, and was found favorable by E.F. Schumacher. The chain of history goes back a little further, however, and it will help to understand our roots, and dig up the common element.
Georgism was founded by Henry George, mutualism by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and individualist anarchism by Josiah Warren. Henry George was influenced by classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, as well as the Physiocrats before them, and even by Proudhon. Proudhon, like George, was also influenced by the classical economists, but just as much by the utopian socialists, such as Charles Fourier and Saint Simon. Josiah Warren was influenced by the classical economists and utopian socialists also, particularly Robert Owen (but he rejected Owenism). It's possible the Ricardian socialists also played an influential role. Most of these influences had one thing in common: Some understanding of the value of labor, or cost.

The Physiocrats saw agricultural labor as the basis of the economy. Adam Smith and David Ricardo, fathers of classical economics, would develop their thought into the classical labor theory of value. The labor theory of value was important for socialists and libertarians to follow, because the labor theory of value demonstrated that people were not getting the full return for their labor, leading to the poverty and non-proprietorship of the masses. Some, such as David Ricardo, understood this but was in favor, while most, including Adam Smith, Saint Simon, the Ricardian Socialists, Pierre Proudhon, and Josiah Warren (who
were all influenced by Smith) and his followers, did not look favorably upon those who legally robbed, or exploited, the workers. Charles Fourier focused on making work less of a burden, and sharing its benefits. John Stuart Mill, the utilitarian philosopher, would also become a socialist and, possibly taking influence from individualist anarchist Josiah Warren, would formulate his own theory of cost (labor) value.

Over a century down the line, Ralph Borsodi would become quite aware of the fact that workers in the city ended up doing monotonous jobs that they hated for little pay, and that the industrial capitalist system of production was not serving the needs of the “little people.” Ralph Borsodi's move “back to the land” was driven by this understanding. Interestingly, there was a movement of artisans who opposed industrialism from the start, affiliated with the rebel, Ned Ludd, who gives us the term “Luddite.” Ralph Borsodi was a neo-Luddite of sorts (though not an extremist), and his taking “back to the land,” which would go on to influence the sustainability movement ever since, was a reaction to his understanding that economic value is not produced by complex and complicated machines, but by human hands.

With the “historical continuity of ideas” now more clear, I would like to clarify that Bill
Mollison stresses that permaculture is not an ideology, but an ethical or philosophical approach to design, so while it is important to look at the historical influences—such as Georgism, mutualism, and distributism—and to draw from their knowledge, if we are going to approach economics from the perspective of permaculture, it’s important not to get caught up in dogmatism, but to keep things practical. Look to the philosophers and their ideologies for their contributions toward design, and use these elements where they fit. But just as an herb spiral, a keyhole garden, or hügelkultur may not be appropriate in every condition, sometimes a cohousing group or condominium may be better suited for a group of people than a housing cooperative, or a credit union than an alternative currency. What is appropriate really depends on what is necessary to meet the ends desired by the individuals involved. These are just elements that may be found helpful in tackling the problems we face. In order to know how to correct the problems, we must first understand them.

**The Problems We Face**

As it is today, many people face problems finding fair access to land on which to build sustainably and on which to garden. They also have a hard time finding capital to start businesses. This leaves many people
having to work low-wage jobs and lease high-rent homes, which makes matters even worse. Ralph Borsodi was well aware of this, and his approach toward community economics was intended to relieve these problems.

A just system of land tenure is essential to ending employment, wage-slavery and landowners’ exploitation of farmers. By arranging equality of access to land for everyone, laborers and tenants will have the alternative of going to the land and producing on their own. This adds to their bargaining power in dealing with employers and landowners. It is their alternative to accepting unjust wages, or payment of excessive rent to landowners.

One of the problems I’ve seen many times amongst people interested in permaculture is that they don’t have any land because it has all been privatized, and their landlord doesn’t want them to tear up the grass for a garden. Being a tenant oftentimes means that one is living temporarily and being a wage-worker often comes with seeking new employment in a term of years. This leaves little economic incentive for lower class people to invest their energy in a garden, especially the kinds of perennial polyculture gardens we would like to move people towards. Even lower middle-class people can have a hard time affording the property, time, and energy required of them from permaculture. Bank loans are offered with interest that cannot be
repaid except by future generations being put into debt.\(^3\) To top it all off, government subsidies give unfair advantages—such as subsidies and tax breaks—to certain kinds of agriculture, and restrict other kinds—such as inner-city gardening and rain-water use—through zoning laws and regulations. All of this makes produce grown in a permaculture manner artificially expensive in comparison, even while it is produced with fewer actual costs. Unfortunately, this leaves permaculture being largely inaccessible to many folks, even while making logical sense.

The causes for these dilemmas are the forms of economic institutions that we currently have in place, which monopolize the means of production and privatize surpluses, and create a human monoculture. They are oversized, strictly hierarchical, and—thanks to conditions created by government and lobbyists, which restrict people’s options—are used by people

\(^3\) When bank loans are offered, only the principal makes it into the market, the interest does not. That is, a debtor receives the money for 100% of the principal, but the interest, sometimes as high as 10% is never released into the economy. This leaves a debt of 110% and a money supply of 100%. Only by future generations being put into debt, or by getting the best of others of one’s own or previous generations, can the money be repaid.
under duress, and so cannot truly be considered voluntary. These include coercive governments and various forms of private property holding hierarchical economic actors, such as the absentee landlord, the private employer, and the monopoly corporations. What they all have in common is their internal hierarchy, and an existence dependent on people’s choices being restricted (when people can’t choose for themselves, they must accept choices they would not make), which allows them to maintain private control of social resources and the surpluses they produce. 4

Politicians and businesspeople work the system in their interest, oftentimes making deals with one another. They extract resources from the population for governmental, corporate, or private (as opposed to personal) 5

4 Those in charge should not alone be blamed, however, for their privileges are dependent upon the tolerance of their citizens, their workers, tenants, and debtors, from whom they gain their taxes, profits, rents, and interest.

5 Here a distinction is being made, between private and personal. Private here refers to a group matter which is under the control of one individual, while personal refers to an individual matter which is under the control of that individual. For instance, a boss’s business is their private property, because the other individuals—the employees—have to do as the boss says.
benefit, in the forms of arbitrary taxation, usurious interest, ground rent, and unearned profits, through the privatization (which is a degree of monopolization) of the three factors of production (land, labor, and capital). They rape the land with petrochemicals, clear-cutting, monoculture, mountain-top mining, and more to maximize these private, corporate, and governmental gains, usurping our collective birthright.

As a result of the economic conditions, we live in a world of corporate monoculture, wherein vastly different people in vastly different environments all reflect the same systems of control, and are not allowed to express themselves in all of their diversity. Throughout the United States, corporations like McDonalds and Wal-Mart have pushed out smaller restaurants, groceries, department, and drug stores, and have centralized wealth, power, and control into fewer hands. The result of centralized control has not only been economic, but it also has negative social and cultural affects, such as pushing out local

A group affair is under the control of an individual. This is different from an individual owner-operator or a worker-cooperator, whose property, in whole or in part, is their own. Their property, the entirety of the item or a share in it, is their own. There is no one outside of them telling them what to do with it.
customs and flavors which would result from a more local economy.

When traveling outside of one’s own locality, one should be humbled and excited by the experience of a new environment and a new culture to take in and appreciate. The lack of these experiences has led to great amounts of boredom and existential dread, among other things. People who are alienated both from their labor and their environment lose sight of their ability to bestow meaning onto the Universe, which is connected to their agency and ability to put form to matter in valuable ways. The expression of our culture and our personal contributions to it being economically infeasible—unless it produces a surplus which can be usurped by someone above us—, many of us feel that our very soul has been pushed out of the economy. Though this feeling may very well be subconscious and not rationalized for most folks, people very much feel the stress, the boredom, and dread that results from being alienated from their own power to make decisions. However, human boredom and dread is dependent first upon the acceptance of the way things are, and belief that the present is the only way things can be. People must stop forfeiting their own power over themselves based on this belief. Rather, one can see the problems as a challenge and an opportunity to grow, take hold of their own power, and start expressing themself without
undue apology. This is done by looking to and acting upon deeper principles.\(^6\)

It is unfortunate, but looking out for the immediate and private benefit of ruling classes at the long-term and collective expense of the environment and lower classes has been the human course of action since at least the dawn of agriculture and social stratification, and the rise of governments. The transition to advanced horticulture and agriculture from

\(^6\) Even while we wish to express ourselves in many unique and exciting ways, which reflect both our personal and cultural values and our relationship to local ecosystems, we are still all fundamentally human, and all share in the desire to know the truth, to be loved, and to experience beauty. We just have different forms we’d prefer for these to take. If we acknowledge both what is fundamental and what differs between people, we can see that what is needed is not anymore monoculture, which forces love, truth, and beauty into one form at the expense of the others, but a diverse polyculture that expresses the myriad of forms that love, truth, and beauty can take. Love, truth, and beauty do not have to take the same form for everyone, and indeed loving others, respecting their understanding of the truth, or their feelings of beauty on a political level entails allowing them to love, think, and feel how they wish on a more personal one, and to differ.
hunting and gathering ensured that more human food could be grown and stored, but governing classes ensured that almost all of this surplus fueled unnecessary luxuries, rather than providing for a common ease of living. The result was that slaves, such as in Egypt, spent their lives creating buildings that enriched only a small group of rulers. While not entirely the same, contemporary workers spend a great deal of their lives providing luxuries to the ruling classes of today.

The wealth that is produced by the lower classes of a society, but which is consumed by the upper classes, is called “economic surplus.” In surplus-building societies—such as those with the economies of feudalism, capitalism, and fascism—it is primarily the ruling class that benefits from the surplus, while the lower classes are often worse off than if a surplus never existed. For instance, even while the invention of the plough allowed for the production of more food, and thus could afford more artisan production of luxuries, peasants in the agricultural era often lived worse-off than hunting and gathering “cave people.” The vast majority of wealth went to the governing classes and those under them who they found favorable. While peasants in agricultural societies could often be found after long days of work malnourished, sleeping on hay on the floors of houses shared with their animals, nobles could be found feasting,
sleeping in beds in manors (mansions) tended to by many servants, all while doing as little manual labor as possible. This is a trend which has continued even to today, when the large majority of working people commonly eat food devoid of nutrition (“empty calories”) and can barely afford to pay rent, while their bosses, landlords, and creditors—who also make up the political class—can afford to eat gourmet food at fancy restaurants and own multiple homes. Food and product consumed by all classes are shipped across the country, in order to centralize production and maintain “order” on behalf of the upper classes and politicians.

The environmental results from the surplus, or waste, generated for the sake of a society’s ruling class’s luxuries have been catastrophic. While the costs of the ruling class are externalized onto the abiding class this leaves little hope for individuals of the abiding class to survive except by similarly exploiting their environment, which is what they have done. Further, all of the labor that could be used to build sustainable housing, community support, and permanent agriculture for all is instead spent maintaining the ruling class’s power (such as subsidies to megafarms) and providing them with luxuries. Thus, common people cannot afford to eat organic produce, cannot afford to build environmentally-sound housing, but instead eat conventionally empty
calories and rent stick-and-cardboard homes that will have to be rebuilt time and again, and cannot be recycled or composted easily. Naturally, under these economic conditions, permaculture isn’t even a second thought to most people (concerns for healthy food and autonomy are the motivating factors for most involved). With the right institutions, however, niches can open for permaculture and appropriate technology, which may even allow them to be established as the norm.

Understanding the Mechanics

Abundance occurs when supply and demand meet on equal terms. See, for example, the “Effects of Price Freedom,” which illustrates the abundance that occurs when prices are allowed to set themselves through free producer and consumer bargaining. As you can see in this example, when producers (offered) and consumers (wanted) are allowed to bargain freely between one another, they settle on what is called the “free market price.” It is called “free market price” because it is the price that results from a lack of government-interference and unilateral monopoly in the economy. The price labeled “free market price” could just as easily be labeled “cost price,” “clearance price,” or “equilibrium price,” as these are all facets of the same phenomenon. At this price level, wherein producers and consumers freely agree on the price, there is
neither surplus nor scarcity (shortage). There is, instead, abundance. This results from the free conditions of supply and demand, consumers (demand) wanting prices as low as possible, and producers (supply) wanting prices as high as possible. Supply and demand was formulated into economic law by Adam Smith, the father of classical economics.

### Effects of Price Freedom

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The function of price is to encourage production of what is wanted, to the extent that wants can be anticipated and production plans can be carried out.

If people are not allowed to freely bargain, as individuals and in groups, and
government sets a price cap on prices, as has been done in some socialist countries, forcing the price downward, scarcity results, because fewer producers are willing to supply goods and services at that price. This can be seen at the 20c marker in the image, where there are only two units offered by supply, even though four are wanted. This is in contrast to the free market price, which offers three items at the price of 30c. The reason a shortage happens at 20c, but not 30c, is because fewer producers are willing to work at that price. So, as you can see, when higher prices result from the free bargaining of people, they are favorable to prices that are compelled by government to be artificially low, because more people get what they need. When governments force prices down, by way of taxes or price caps and such, it results in economic scarcity.

The opposite problem to economic scarcity is economic surplus. When governments give monopolistic control to corporations and private firms, by offering exclusive licensing, tax breaks, subsidies, etc. and by pushing out their competition allow them to become price-fixers, they set prices artificially high, which results in economic surpluses, because consumers are often unable to pay for all of the items produced, or producers make an artificially high income (which is stored away or wasted on frivolities). This can be seen above in the price 40c, for
instance, where, even though there are four items produced, only two of them end up making it to market, but at a higher unit price. Surplus does not always result in material waste on the side of producers, though it often does, and indeed is responsible for all industrially-manufactured surpluses. Oftentimes, the surplus comes in the form of potential producers being pushed out of the market, allowing the remaining monopolist to sell all of their remaining products at high prices. When the prices of necessities are pushed artificially high, consumers have little choice but to pay high prices, and no material surplus necessarily occurs, but instead surplus prices, which allow for consumption without cost (and thus waste), boom, leaving few wages for working class consumers to spend on luxuries and leisure. The beneficiaries of these high prices are private and corporate lenders, bosses, and landlords, who leisure in luxury on everyone else’s behalf, and well beyond their actual contributions.

The difference between the free market (30c) and the fixed price (40c, for instance) is the surplus price (10c), which comes in the forms of interest, profit, and rent. Many knowledgeable community economists, taking after their Ricardian socialist, mutualist and individualist anarchist forebears, believe that any form of interest, profit, or rent is
problematic, and comes at the expense of the lives of debtors, workers, and tenants.

In layman’s terms, David Ricardo’s law of rent suggests that ground rent, the surplus value of land, is the difference in value between different parcels of land which have been untouched by human hands, or which are used by human hands of equal skill, endurance, and mental capacity. In other words, ground rent is the extra amount a person can get from harvesting from or using better land for production, which is not due to their own diligence in any way. For instance, if you have four parcels of land, and four people of exactly similar capacity who need four pieces of land, any difference in the amount they produce is not because of their differences, but because of the differences in the land. So, if the first parcel, A, produces 4 units, the second, B, produces 3, the third, C, produces 2, and the fourth, D, produces 1 unit, it would look like this (you can imagine A as a temperate rainforest and D as a desert, with B and C in between, if it helps):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcel</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Units</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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The individuals labor the exact same on their parcel of land, so in order to find out the ground rent we merely have to subtract the margin of production—which is the least
valuable land put to productive use—from the piece of land we wish to find the given rent on. So, the ground rent on parcel A is 3 units, because the total produced, 4, minus the margin of production, 1, is 3. That means that ¾ of the wealth that A controls is not due to their working harder or more diligently, but because they had control of better land. The margin of production, because each person works the same, is equal to each worker’s wages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcel</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Units</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

Under equilibrium conditions, there remains a total of 10 units produced between the four individuals, but the rent (6 total) is shared between them, giving each person their wages and a dividend of 1.5 units each, a total of 2.5 units. Under monopoly conditions, where A, B, and C remain private property, A, B, and C may simply decide to stop working as hard as D, or may decide to rent their property to D, and gain 3 units without earning it at all (since they didn’t make the land, just claimed it), perhaps even ceasing to work themselves, living a life of perpetual vacation.⁷

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⁷ In the real world, these conditions exist because the government enforces private property rights and does not force
Profit and interest can be measured the same way as rent, but instead of calculating the value of land, one has to calculate the unearned income that is derived from having various kinds of governmental privileges. For instance, government issued licenses and patent rights provide their holders with profits and interest on their capital, and can be considered “rent”-bearing “real estate” in that sense. You can think of the properties A-D as being various trades that are regulated and licensed by government. Without government licensing, zoning, subsidies, etc. the only factor in income would be the value of the job being done, but these distort this natural difference in value. In the case they are found necessary anyway, they can be carried out more locally by community institutions, which demand that, in return for these monopoly privileges, the monopolist must share their surpluses.

**Surplus, Abundance, and Mutualization**

The difference between surplus and abundance is very important. Abundance is distributed more widely and more wisely, while surplus is hoarded and wasted. When

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property-owners to share their surplus, the rent.
something is abundant, it is widely available, and, if it costs anything to make, it is sold and used soon after production. But when there is a surplus of something, it is sitting in a warehouse not being used, even if it took energy to create, or is even thrown away. As you can see, surplus is very wasteful, while items of abundance are put to use (though they can be stripped if they are not managed properly). When there is abundance, production and consumption are fairly balanced and allow for the greatest returns, or consumption can occur without production; there is left neither waste (produced but unused items, surplus) nor want (more consumption than availability, scarcity). Everything that is created is put to use, so less needs to be created in the first place.

It’s important to remember that prices reflect and direct the allocation of limited resources. When we are talking about prices that lead toward surplus, we are talking about creating items that don’t get distributed, are misused, or which are wasted. Similarly, when we are talking about prices that lead toward

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8 Nothing is free. Surpluses are products of people’s labor, wasted. Because of the social nature of economy, and the collective nature of the workload within it, when one person’s labor is wasted, everyone loses out in the form of a reduced standard of living.
scarcity, we are talking about lacking items to distribute, which are needed.

At the free market price, which is also the equilibrium price, supply and demand meet on equal terms, and balance one another fairly. The result is relative abundance, wherein more items can be exchanged than under conditions of price-fixing or regulation. When all items produced are sold on the market, and there isn’t scarcity, this is referred to as “market clearing.” The equilibrium price, consequently, is also the clearance price, as the free market price results in neither surplus nor scarcity, but everything being fairly distributed. Borsodi says,

Only through a free market can prices be justly established and economic activities effectively regulated. This calls for each producer producing his best, but in such a market, competition must be fraternal. In effect, in a free market cooperation between buyers and sellers establishes prices which are just. Fraternal competition must replace all the forms of predatory competition which we mistakenly accept or excuse in the present capitalistic order. To create a truly free market, all regulation and interference by government of prices, wages, rent, interest and profits must be abolished, and the market given the opportunity to regulate them in accord with the law of supply and demand.
Interestingly, the mutualist and individualist anarchist economists understood—perhaps taking after the Ricardian socialists—that the free market price was also the labor, or cost, price, and consequently, any attempt to control prices through legal measures would push prices further away from their natural limit at the level of labor's value, creating shortages or surpluses. Capitalists do this on purpose, colluding with governments to corner markets, eliminate competition, and force prices up.

In response to the problem of capitalism's economic surplus—the overproduction, maldistribution, and price-gouging of goods and services—, many have set about the opposite problem of promoting scarcity, or underproduction. For instance, in the state-socialist or Communist countries, markets have been regulated and directed, and producers have been asked to put aside their personal interests for the good of an abstraction, such as “the collective” or “the nation.” Communist, socialist, and welfare nations have tried to control prices through taxes on income, but these taxes never eliminate the problem of centralized control and consumer extortion completely, and often incentivize slow-downs in production. They fix prices in various ways to be sure no one gets “too much.” The result has been economic shortages.
Others, still, have taken to ideologies such as deep ecology and primitivism, which tend to reject many of the major components of complicated technology and human civilization completely.

Communism and primitivism, one social and the other ecological in orientation, are related only in their tacit promotion of practical economic scarcity, or productive shortages. State-socialist or Communist societies have often resorted to bread-lines and soup kitchens to feed their populations, and have at times resorted to compulsion—such as work camps—to get anything done, simply because volunteer labor breaks down when it comes to degrading, hard, boring, or otherwise demanding work. As the old line of question goes, “Who will clean the sewers?” This isn’t even a concern to deep ecologists and primitivists, who may expect people to give up on technology altogether. While often bringing up valid criticism of technology, these folks are complicit in “throwing out the baby with the bathwater.” Even while some technology only has an apparent benefit and others’ actual benefits have been usurped by the ruling class, I don’t see people yearning to be cavemen again anytime soon. As is pointed out in “Anarchism vs. Primitivism,” by Brian Oliver Sheppard, “Deprived of agriculture, the majority of the global population would immediately perish.”
As you can see, then, there are two kinds of behaviors that are unsustainable for human life: those that create surplus, or waste—such as capitalism—and those that respond to these problems by creating scarcity, or want. Surplus, or waste, refers to overproduction and underconsumption; when more is created than is necessary. Capitalism, as we have today, is an example of a surplus-oriented economy. Scarcity, or want, however, refers to underproduction and overconsumption, when less is created than is necessary. State-socialism and primitivism are examples of this kind of economy. Instead of want (scarcity)—as the communists and primitivists would have it—or a continuation of the waste (surplus) of capitalism, it is important to do something else. As Ralph Borsodi saw it,

If the whole world is to be made free, and the peoples of the so-called free world made completely free, justice and not equality, must be the aim of the economic order. It is not true that economic equality must be imposed by government upon human kind, in order to abolish poverty. Prosperity is highest where political tyranny and economic injustice is lowest. Poverty, on the other hand, continues in proportion as equality is imposed.

[...]
so-called Welfare States, nor Communism in the so-called “people’s democracies” are adequate social orders. Social renaissance calls for abandonment of Socialism and Communism and transforming Capitalism into a free and just economic order.

The sustainable alternative to the surpluses of capitalism, as we have here in America, and the scarcity that state-socialism or primitivism would bring, is provided by the philosophies of permaculture, appropriate technology, distributism, Georgism, and mutualism, which are philosophies of balance and abundance.

Indeed, whenever a free market is brought up, such as the one promoted by Borsodi, concerns arise as to what is to be done about naturally-occurring income inequality, which might not be state-induced. Especially of concern is the rise of natural monopolies, which Marxist and other philosophers believe to naturally result from economies of scale and property in real estate. These were concerns also to the mutualist and individualist anarchists who influenced Borsodi, as well as to Borsodi himself, whose solution is

Mutualization. No just society is possible unless it is recognized that not two but three distinct sectors exist in every
economy: (1) the naturally private\textsuperscript{9}, (2) the naturally monopolistic and (3) the naturally public. All natural monopolies — railroads, power companies, water services, gas companies, pipelines, telegraph and telephone systems, irrigation districts, banks of issue — must be mutualized (owned and operated in the interests of those who use them) and by rebating all surplus earnings pro rata to users, insure that their services are furnished at cost, and no profits are appropriated by private interests nor exploited by the government.

It should also be remembered that—along with his answer of mutualization to the problems of natural monopolies—, Ralph Borsodi was not only a proponent of free markets, but also of free land and free money, that is, of land and money being made available to everyone and put under as much competition as it could stand (he believed control of these was naturally monopolistic). In keeping with the mutualist tradition, coupled with mutual organization, free money would eliminate unfair interest on monetary debts and capital exchanges, free land would eliminate ground rent on land, and free markets would eliminate unearned profits, without the need to get government involved in the first place. In fact, as many anarchists and decentralists saw

\textsuperscript{9} If we want to be sticklers about words, he should have said “personal,” in keeping with the mutualist tradition.
it, it was absolutely necessary to break the law through acts of civil disobedience and non-violent direct-action, because the government and the corporations are controlled by a ruling class or elite, making it difficult, if not impossible, for common people to influence its actions. However, others still felt it necessary to interact with government, especially on the more local levels, and with private and corporate businesses. Ralph Borsodi would write in his “Decentralist Manifesto,”

A new world is being born.
If this new world is to be a better world than the one now dying and to make possible a fuller fruition of the human spirit, then it will be very different from the Capitalist world of today, and different from the world which the dictators of Russia and China are providing, and different from the Socialist world into which most of the world is now drifting.

Concerned and thoughtful men and women are challenged to arrest the present drift and drive into a mechanized barbarism, and to contribute to the birth of a world in which persons will be free to realize their potentialities as creative beings. Such leaders must have the courage to assert themselves, and must discipline themselves to think about all the institutions essential to such a world.

Borsodi is generally correct about the steps needed in political and community economics. Right now, the farmer and worker
are not rewarded properly for their labor, but the reasons for this, as Borsodi correctly points out, is because of the nature of the political and economic system, which can be confronted by community control and local economy. This has meaning of great importance to people who are interested in permaculture, because it means that even though we are facing great difficulty getting others interested, it is a mechanical issue of economics, which can be resolved if we take the proper steps. Institutions such as those promoted by Borsodi—land trusts, cooperatives, mutual banks, etc.—as well as “human-scaled” appropriate technologies promoted by his follower, E.F. Schumacher, promise to enable the kinds of localized, agrarian, and free economies that people interested in permaculture can flourish and prosper in. This is made possible by properly treating the means of production and exchange.

**Means of Production and Exchange**

The institutions explored in this text put the means of production and exchange into the hands of those who use them, thereby challenging their monopolization, which we have become all too accustomed to. Monopolies on the means of production and exchange take the form of private and
corporate employers, landlords, and lenders, as well as price-gouging producers enabled by governments through licensing, selective zoning, etc. As an alternative to these private and corporate monopolists, community economists have supported voluntary and member-controlled institutions that redistribute their surpluses (when they are not completely eliminated, due to natural monopoly). For instance, in place of private and corporate employers, community economists have supported the self-employment of workers in democratic cooperatives. Instead of private and corporate landlords and lenders, they suggest land trusts and credit unions. Instead of using the state’s monopoly money, they suggest using alternative and complementary currencies. These institutions and practices enrich the people at the very bottom, and keep them from being preyed on by rent-seeking, profit-hungry, price-gouging, and usurious capitalists. Workers in cooperatives share in the income that they make together, while occupants in land trusts no longer pay rent to private landlords. Where community institutions accidently accrue a surplus, or where it is necessary for leveling effects, it is best socialized amongst the membership, and not privatized. Alternative community institutions are methods of organizing the means of production and exchange to serve the interests of their participants. They are voluntary, member-run, and distribute their surpluses.
There are classically understood to be only three factors or means of production, which take the forms of land, labor, and capital, the product of mixing land and labor. When any of these means of production are monopolized, they supply their holder a surplus income. For instance, when land is monopolized, and is not made freely available for homesteading, landlords can charge those alienated from the land rent for using land which was created by nature, and did not cost the original user anything at all to claim. Similarly, when labor is monopolized, by way of government licensing for instance, the holder of the license becomes the employer to those who would otherwise operate without a license, taking a share of their production, called “profit.” When capital is monopolized, especially by making bank loans largely inaccessible, the capitalist can earn interest on their capital. These are all forms of surplus, and bosses, landlords, and lenders are the beneficiaries of surpluses, in the forms of profit, rent, and interest. The surplus value of land is rent, capital is interest, and labor is profit. The cost, or labor, value is always equal to the laborer’s full wages, which is always equal to the utility added in their share of production. Often workers do not receive their full wages, due to a monopoly of one of the factors of production.

Money is often confused for capital, but money is not actually capital, though it can
represent or be backed by capital. Money is a means of exchange, a contract between buyer and seller. Money which is not itself a commodity does not have any intrinsic value, but only representative value. Money represents goods and services, and can be redeemed in them, giving it its voluntary and natural value. When an individual is not allowed to create their own money, their freedom of contract is being restricted; they are not allowed to create certificates backed by their own goods and services. When this occurs, as when governments impose legal tender laws and such, people are forced to accept bank loans under the condition that they pay the bank back with monetary interest (not to be confused with the capital interest of the goods it is backed by). They are essentially paying a third party for the right to contract—a right which is considered by many philosophers of jurisprudence to be a natural and inalienable one—because the government has made it illegal or artificially difficult to contract for themselves, as they would, say, through a mutual bank of issue or a credit union which produces its own currency. The means of exchange, or money—which is not a means of production (though it may represent one of these, as a title to them)—should be free to all, for if one cannot create a means to exchange the products of their labor their right to freely contract is not being recognized, and they will be made victims of extortion.
The means of production are best controlled by the correct operator identities, collective, personal, or mutual. Land is best treated as a common or collective asset, as land was not the result of economic production or labor, but preceded us. As we are dependent on its preexistence and our ability to utilize land, it is a birthright, not a privilege. Labor, on the other hand, exists only at the expense of the worker, and is no business but their own. Capital is suspended in various degrees between these two poles of collective land and individual labor, as capital is the result of laboring on the land. So far as the value of capital results from the value of labor, it is right that capital is held independently from the commons, but so far as capital’s value is derived from the natural scarcity of the resources from which it is made, it is a social inheritance, to be possessed, but not privately owned, by its user or improver. Therefore, capital is cooperativized between those who use it directly, or mutualized between buyers and sellers.

Giving the correct identity—individual, collective, or mutual—control over the appropriate kinds of property—labor, land, or capital—is essential to “fraternal competition,” as Borsodi called it, and a lack of monopoly. When land, for instance, is allowed to become controlled by the individual against the claims of the collective, it results in the monopolization
of that land, and the ability of the landlord to extract surplus, in the form of rent, from tenants and consumers. An opposite problem occurs when labor is considered to be a matter of collective, rather than individual, control. When labor does not get its full reward, as seen by the individual, shortages naturally occur, and it becomes necessary for the property-owner to pay managers to keep people productive. In solution, land trusts place ownership in the hands of the collective identity of the community, free money places ownership of labor into the hands of the worker, and cooperative and mutual ownership of capital balances the needs of the individual and the collective. The result is abundance, in the form of full self-employment, higher wages for labor, lower prices for consumers, and an absence of waste and want.

When the means of production are priced at equilibrium— an effect of original claims being held by the correct identities in relation to the means of production (land is collective, labor is individual, etc.)— the result is voluntary and member-run relationships and institutions, such as cooperatives, while prices out of equilibrium result in compulsory and privately- or corporately-controlled relationships and institutions, such as the property of landlords and bosses. Imagine each unit in “The Effects of Price Freedom” being provided by a separate self-employed
producer: It takes one person to create one unit. If prices are out of equilibrium, and are set too high by a government or monopoly, there are some producers forced out of self-employment and into unemployment, resulting in fewer goods produced. These unemployed producers are then left at the whim of the remaining producer for employment. By employing them, the remaining producers—the private property owners—can skim off a portion of their product, and they can do nothing about it, but thank them for the employment.

Employers always set wages, and workers can accept or walk away, leaving the profits and interest for the boss. That workers accept wages lower than their natural free market rate, and have no bargaining power, is a result of government interference: Indeed, if workers do not pay their rent or taxes in government money, they will be forced out onto the streets by the barrel of the policeman’s gun (if they resist). Because they are not allowed to create their own money (which is a right of contract), forcing them to pay their debts in legal tender, and cannot homestead public land freely, workers have few options but to accept low wages in federal bills under the conditions set by the government and monopolies, or to resist them, which is risky, revolutionary stuff.
Because workers are paid less than their labor’s natural value, they naturally do not produce as well as they would if they were incentivized by the exchange itself (and not by government forcing them to earn dollars), and so the entire economy suffers, unless supervisors and managers are selected and paid a wage closer to the natural rate to keep the workers productive. If they do not produce according to the manager’s or owner’s demands, they lose their job, and cannot earn the money that they need to pay their landlord or the government to have a place to live. The entire system of capitalism is dependent upon government compulsion and monopoly, and these are responsible for the authoritarian relationships of landlords, bosses, and usurers, and their surplus returns of rent, profit, and interest. If not for the government and its support of monopolies, these would no longer exist.

**The Decentralist Solution**

It is crucial to move away from the models of hierarchical authority that present themselves in our present system. Economic institutions appropriate for permaculture should instead be voluntary and member-controlled, and should reflect the diversity of their local human cultures and ecological settings. They should distribute their surpluses and take into consideration the collective nature of land and
the individual nature of labor, treating land as a common asset and labor as a matter of individual liberty, with individual wellbeing and community understood as emergent results.

When people are free to choose the programs and institutions they participate in, and are allowed a say in those institutions to the degree they are affected by decisions, they are less likely to be exploited, and are more likely (and capable) to remain self-reliant, especially when the community expects each individual to carry their own weight. When there is no one above them—no politicians, bosses, landlords, or usurers—, there is no one to extract unearned income from the citizens, workers, tenants, or debtors. Consequently, everyone flourishes from their labor, being allowed to keep what they earn and pay less for more, without having to put an extra burden on the Earth. People aren’t usually willing participants in groups that exploit them, and they will generally oppose decisions that will have known negative consequences for them. Thus, when people associate as they wish, and can make choices that benefit them, their associations reflect their values. When everyone does this, society flourishes, without need for central authority.

The appropriate institutions facilitate the kinds of localized exchanges, community self-sufficiency, access to land, personal self-
determination, and mutual aid that are necessary for a flourishing and abundant post-industrial society, such as that desired by permaculture practitioners. They mitigate the forces that enable arbitrary taxation, usurious interest, ground rent, and unearned profits, and consequently allow people to keep more of their income, have fair access to credit for business startups, acquire land, and keep the full value of their labor. Their common elements are voluntary association and member control, a lack of hierarchy. They are also properly scaled, not being too big or too small to suit the needs of the participants. This all allows for the benefits of production, consumption, and distribution to be shared more widely among the participants, creating a situation of abundance. By properly placing ownership of land in the hands of the community, and labor under the control of the individual, and allowing for free competition and cooperation, surpluses can be eliminated or voluntarily socialized.

Voluntary and member-controlled institutions can include various kinds of unions, stock programs, cooperatives, communal spaces, credit unions, land trusts, and more. As a result of being member-controlled, these distribute wealth and power more widely among their participants. Institutions appropriate to permaculture communities include cooperatives for production,
consumption, and distribution of goods and services; credit unions and mutual banks for access to financial services and credit for capital; land trusts and housing cooperatives to provide access to land and housing; homeschooling cooperatives and student- or peer-directed “free” schools; mutual aid societies to provide for community services such as healthcare, and for community infrastructure such as electricity companies; and associations, networks, or confederations of these others. It is best if these institutions provide for their own methods of governance, including conflict-mediation or dispute resolution and common law procedures. As soon as government steps in it starts to exploit the situation and impose rules that benefit its elite members. As Bill Mollison says,

Systems of government are currently based on self-interest, economic pragmatism, belief, impractical theory, and power-centered minorities (religious, military, capitalist, communist, familial, or criminal). Almost all such groups set up competitive and “adversary-oriented” systems.

We need to set about, in an orderly, sensible, and cooperative way, a system of replacing power-centered politics and political hierarchies with a far more flexible, practical, and information-centered system responsive to research and feedback, and with long-term goals of stability. And we need to do this in an ethical and non-
threatening way, so that the transition to a cooperative (versus conflicting) global society is creative (not destructive).

The world needs a new, non-polarised, and non-contentious politic; one not made possible by those in situations that promote a left-right, black-white, capitalist-communist, believer-infidel thinking. Such systems are, like it or not, promoting antagonism and destroying cooperation and interdependence. Confrontational thinking, operating through the political or power system, has destroyed cultural, intellectual, and material resources that could have been used, in a life-centered ethic, for earth repair.

While many of the institutions named can be carried out in a legal fashion, and indeed already flourish within a capitalist economy, a great deal of their benefits are reduced by complying with the arbitrary laws of governments. This is, in part, because governments purposefully create laws to hinder cooperative production and its competition with capitalists, by providing exclusive licenses, zoning privileges, tax breaks, subsidies, and more to crony capitalists, thereby centralizing production into a smaller number of companies. This allows them to establish relationships of control,¹⁰ and oftentimes a

¹⁰ This effectively makes the capitalist a manager or baron of the government, very similar to the feudal
source of political persuasion or taxation or discounted goods or services, which is gladly provided by the monopolist in return for their privileges. In some of these cases, due to economies of scale, there is very little that can be done to confront this problem, outside of direct-action sometimes as severe as community expropriation of the monopolist’s property (revolutionary syndicalism, for instance), as pressure on politicians does very little to solve problems. However, where licensing, zoning, or legality is preventing production, consumption, or distribution in some way, there is much potential for savings and high returns for the thoughtful and careful dissident. Permaculturists, for instance, could start unlicensed restaurants and groceries in their living rooms or garages, opening up new avenues of income away from the farmers' markets. This becomes even more plausible between people who utilize a common currency, and even more so if they own land together. Bill Mollison is correct when he suggests that

Such work [as learning to grow, build, and manage natural systems, and teach others] is urgent, important, and necessary, and we cannot leave it to the

relationships of the past, where a monarch would break his kingdom up into fiefdoms to be managed by the nobles, giving them privileges in return for service.
whims of government (always short-term) or industry as we know it today.

We know how to solve every food, clean energy, and sensible shelter problem in every climate; we have already invented and tested every necessary technique and technical device, and have access to all of the biological material we could ever use. The tragic reality is that very few sustainable systems are designed or applied by those who hold power, and the reason for this is obvious and simple: to let people arrange their own food, energy, and shelter is to lose political and economic control over them. We should cease to look to power structures, hierarchical systems, or governments to help us, and devise ways to help ourselves.

The key ingredient is more trust in one another than in the government and corporations. Without mutual trust and allegiance, the project is doomed to failure, and the risk is not worth undertaking. Such a project requires a great deal of ethical discipline, as it must be an act of putting what is good before what is legal. Otherwise, it will have a hard time gaining support.

Those of us who see the problem, and who understand it deeply, can look at it as an opportunity to achieve great things. All human institutions—be they governments, corporations, or private establishments—are subject to change and to competition. Evolution
entails subjecting outmoded institutions to the forces of natural selection, and establishing something better to take their place. This means creating institutions which provide the same benefits with fewer costs, allowing for abundance. Doing so, and thereby confronting Leviathan, can provide for a lifetime of adventure, if not more.

**Institutions Explored**

Unions are voluntary associations of people working to solve a common problem. The most common kind of union is a labor union, which is an association of employees who act in concert with one another to better their working conditions. Other kinds of unions exist too, however, such as tenant unions, which organize to better their living conditions, as well as consumer unions that organize against unfair prices. Unions are not an end in themselves, but a means, and can be problematic if they are not properly used. They should only be used to confront problems created by the government and corporations, and should not be considered a solution unto themselves. Ideally, people own their jobs and their homes, and unions serve no purpose. Only so long as there are tenants and workers should there be tenant and labor unions, but just as transitional organizations. Owner-operators have no use for unions, because they have cooperatives.
Cooperatives are like unions, but instead of being associations to better conditions of workers or tenants while they are living under the authority of bosses and landlords, they are associations of people who own the property they use, but they do so in association, and so have no bosses or landlords. Cooperatives provide many benefits relating to scale, such as allowing people to share property that they otherwise could not own by themselves. They can serve many purposes, such as bringing workers together for mutual self-employment in a worker cooperative, consumers together to share the costs of bulk purchases in a consumer cooperative, or people together to share living expenses in a housing cooperative. As the property of a cooperative is owned by the members as a group, cooperatives are democratic institutions, which allow their members a say in how the property is managed.

A land trust is one or more parcels of land the control of which has been handed over in trust to a trustee, who is obligated by law to manage the land in the best interests of its beneficiaries, and according to the conditions established by the grantor. Land trusts can provide their beneficiaries with land and housing at lower than traditional market rates, allowing people with a fixed or low income the ability to access land on which to
live, and to have stability much like a traditional homeowner. Land trusts can also be used for conservation purposes, as an alternative to government-controlled “public” land, which is too often opened to lumber companies, well drillers, and miners. In most scenarios of land trusts as they were promoted by Ralph Borsodi, the trustee of the land trust would let the land to the beneficiaries, whose lease payments would fund the operations of the trust. Dividends of any rental profits would be divided among the participants, thereby leveling their conditions to some extent. Those who had the nicest plots would share the value of the plot with others through their lease payments. Land trusts of this sort ensured that the land was occupied by the most productive applicant, that there was wilderness and common area left, and that the land would be protected for generations from the encroachments of private property and parceling out. Absentee landlords would have a hard time setting up shop under the authority of a land trust, simply because land trusts open the availability of land up, thereby creating competition for the landlord. Thus, the land trust enables homesteading, and decreases rent-seeking behavior.

Mutual organizations are similar to trusts in that a legal relationship of trust is established between the mutual organization and its consumers, who own the policy of the
organization. A mutual organization—such as an insurance provider, financial institution, etc.—will sell its policy to those who use its services, and thereby remain under legal obligation to fulfill the terms of that policy, which could include matters relating to life or health insurance or financial issues. By holding the policy, consumers maintain a degree of control and security, knowing that their rates cannot be manipulated. The policy, in most cases, also gives policy-holders a claim to profits, which must be returned in the form of a dividend or refund. Thus, mutual organizations can provide people valuable services with a great amount of security. These can include life insurance, dental insurance, car insurance, home insurance, etc. as well as secured loans from financial institutions like mutual savings or credit banks for cheaper than conventional market rates.

Credit unions and RCAs are two other kinds of financial institutions appropriate to permaculture. Credit unions are not-for-profit financial cooperatives that provide credit programs to their members at competitive rates. They allow people to apply for loans and various other services that can be found at typical banks, but can provide better interest rates than many private and corporate financial institutions because of their ownership structure. Similarly, Rotating Credit Associations, or RCAs, are groups of non-
specialists who pool their money together to provide one another loans. Shares in the RCA are purchased and divvied on a periodic basis, often with a small amount of interest attached to the recipient’s loan. In this way, the community of lender-recipients all benefit from those earlier in line receiving their loans and putting them to productive use, with those recipients being able to acquire property much quicker than they otherwise would alone. Everyone wins out.

Alternative and complementary currencies allow people who have a hard time getting ahold of dollars to make their exchanges in other ways. The dollar is artificially scarce, compelling many people to take loans at very high interest rates, and oftentimes bankrupting them. Alternative and complementary currencies have the potential to be much more accessible for people. Unlike the dollar, which is artificially scarce, alternative and complementary currencies come in abundance. So long as we wish to develop away from capitalism and governmental politics, we must move away from using the dollar, which has been used to maintain control over citizens and to use them for tax revenue, and which has allowed bosses, landlords, and usurers to force workers, tenants, and debtors into poverty.
Condominiums and cohousing are similar to housing cooperatives, in that each involves a degree of joint or common ownership, but they are different in that each living quarters is more than less autonomous unto itself, whereas a housing cooperative will generally make use of common areas such as bathrooms and kitchens and living areas, leaving only bedrooms for personal use, but not personal ownership. In a condominium, each unit—such as an apartment or office—will be owned separately, and is usually autonomous unto itself, having its own living areas, kitchens, and bathrooms. Common areas, however, will be owned commonly or jointly. Cohousing is very similar to condominiums, except rather than sharing a single building, as condominium residents usually do, cohousing makes use of small homes which are autonomous unto themselves, but which are accompanied by a common house, which will generally have larger living and kitchen and sometimes bathing facilities than the individual homes. In cohousing communities, personal homes are built with the common house in consideration, and with many of the costs attached to traditional housing being split with the common house. Thus, personal homes tend to be smaller to allow for the common house, but residents feel they gain from having personal as well as community living areas.
Communal spaces are another great project for the permaculture community. These can include community gardens, in which people share or split a garden plot; tool sharing sheds, where tools are donated or stored after purchase for members to use; coworking centers for people to work in less isolated conditions; “maker” and hacker spaces for technology; and more. Like cooperatives, communal spaces can provide the benefits of scale and are best run democratically, but unlike cooperatives communal spaces are built around productive use more than economic exchange.

The sharing economy, also known as “collaborative consumption,” is also complementary to permaculture in many ways. Like communal spaces, the sharing economy is based around sharing, but unlike communal spaces the ownership is kept more personal or private. In the sharing economy, people will use their personal cars to provide taxi services, their homes as inns, and similar scenarios. The sharing economy has also been criticized for externalizing costs onto providers and centralizing their income streams and decision-making power into corporate boards, however. Some institutions, such as car- or bicycle-sharing cooperatives blur the lines a bit between cooperatives, communal ownership, and the sharing economy, though. This
category is best treated on a case-by-case basis.

Similar in some ways to cooperatives, while not being as thorough or democratic, are transitional institutions such as stock ownership programs and buyers’ clubs. One prominent example is the ESOP or Employee Stock Option Program, which allows employees to purchase stock in the company they work at and share in some of the profits. Another is the buyer’s club, wherein consumers pay for a membership, which allows them to make purchases for reduced rates. Community-Supported Agriculture, or CSA, is another example, wherein shares of farm goods are purchased by consumers before they are produced, and divided afterward, providing the farmer access to the money to get started.

Confederations of communities and their institutions can often be advantageous, too. Cooperatives, mutual organizations, the sharing economy, etc. could all flourish from establishing mutually beneficial relations with one another. Indeed, cooperative confederations are not uncommon at all, and can be thought of as cooperatives of cooperatives, where each member of the confederation is an organization. These confederations often provide valuable networking, information logging, and
advertising services for their member-organizations.

It is important to point out that some of the institutions described are more voluntary and participatory than others, and when that is the case they should be preferred over more compulsory or hierarchical ones, because they are more likely to have the results of relative (but not absolute) income equality and consideration toward human rights.

Voluntary and non-hierarchical institutions like worker cooperatives transform workers from being employees of bosses to being self-employed owner-operators. Land trusts, housing cooperatives, cohousing models, and condominiums transform the tenants of landlords into owner-occupants. Mutual banks, credit unions, and RCAs transform the debtor of the private or corporate lender into debtor-creditors, who themselves extend credit to others. In effect, these kinds of institutions put the three factors of production—land, labor, and capital—and their surpluses—rent, profit, and interest—under the control of those who use and labor to produce them. The result is abundance, where prices clear and settle into equilibrium at the cost of production (labor), leaving neither waste nor want, with everyone having their needs met relative to one another.
The most important of the aforementioned institutions are those that can provide the most benefits. It is arguable that community institutions which generate or enable even more community institutions to come about through their existence—such as financial and real estate institutions—are the most important, but these are also the most technical and complicated to start. A mutual bank, credit union, or RCA can provide financial assistance toward the establishment of cooperatives, mutuals, etc. and land trusts can provide reasonably-priced land on which these institutions can operate. Cooperatives often find difficulty getting financed or affording land, but these institutions can help with these problems. By associating into larger networks, associations, and confederations, the projects can be scaled up and the benefits of scale reaped.

A Sustainable Future

Financial independence, access to land, and the freedom to make exchanges allows all to become owner-operators, owner-occupants, and self-reliant people. Those who currently have a hard time living off of the land and utilizing alternative technologies will no longer be hindered from doing so when human institutions are voluntary and member-run. With access to capital and land through financial institutions like mutual banks, credit
unions, and RCAs, and real estate institutions like land trusts, housing cooperatives, and cohousing, people are enabled to start their own businesses and more readily acquire land for homesteading, personal or cooperative. By challenging arbitrary governance, many of the projects that are currently out-of-zone, unlicensed, overregulated, and illegal—such as front-yard gardens and water collection, community energy production, sewage treatment, and other appropriately-scaled technologies—will become legally and monetarily possible. With self-ownership opens opportunities for everyone in the servant classes of society—workers, tenants, debtors, citizens—, and without a master class—bosses, landlords, usurers, politicians—prices are forced down and wages up, eliminating the unearned surpluses of profit, rent, interest, and, if government is done away with, taxes.

The resulting society is one composed of people who own the property that they live, work, and play on—either as individuals or in cost-sharing groups like cooperatives—and who consequently are able to live more self-sufficient lifestyles. They are able to tear up their grass and plant a garden if they want to, to start a business in their living room, and to utilize whatever technologies they want to. With the government no longer toying with prices and cornering markets—through price caps, taxes, tax breaks, subsidies, exclusive
licensing, arbitrary zoning laws, etc.—they can settle into equilibrium, where they produce neither surpluses to be appropriated or wasted by private and corporate capitalists, nor scarcity and shortage, but instead abundance, in the form of low prices for consumers and high wages for producers. These low prices and high wages are currently hampered by capitalists skimming off surpluses for themselves, in the form of rent, interest, and profit. These surpluses cost everyone who works for a living, in the form of high prices and low wages. The result is an abundance—rent, profit, and interest—for the private and corporate property-owners—landlords, bosses, and usurers—but scarcity for everyone else—tenants, workers, and debtors—a condition known as surplus. A true abundance is spread about society, and is not concentrated into the hands of a few monopolists.

A great majority of waste is the result of economic surplus, because economic surplus occurs when someone has more than they are themselves willing to work for. The rent of landlords, profit of bosses, and interest of usurers are unearned incomes, and these are often wasted on unsustainably consumptive behaviors. Not only do they take more than they earn, when people are allowed to do so, they do not feel the costs of making poor choices with their income, because they have been divorced from cost (labor). Landlords,
bosses, and usurers gain their surplus portions—rent, profit, and interest—not from labor, but from owning property. Owning property is not a cost to anyone, but a benefit, and so these classes get a double benefit when they also get paid for owning property or having government privileges like exclusive trade licenses. When people can consume, without feeling any costs, they are much more likely to overstock and waste things. It costs them nothing.

The solution to waste, then, is largely connected to the internalization of costs, which occurs alongside the free market price, when land and credit is made readily available, and government interference is nonexistent. When costs of decisions are internalized—when people have to work for what they take, and cannot just consume the labor of others—, people are more responsible with their choices, taking into consideration their longer-term costs and benefits. They tend to conserve what they have earned, use things before they spoil, and make only necessary purchases, wasting very little.

Institutions such as cooperatives, mutual organizations, credit unions, etc. tend to internalize the costs choices onto their own members, neither subsidizing them in a socialist manner, nor exploiting them in a capitalist one. Instead of providing a surplus to
a boss, a landlord, or usurious lender, these institutions eliminate surpluses through free pricing, or socialize them through consumer policy-holding and profit-sharing. Land trusts, putting the land into the hands of the community, internalize the costs of natural resource extraction onto the producers and consumers, by socializing the rent and regulating resource-extraction and sale. Putting ownership of land into the hands of the collective and internalizing the costs to the owners keeps things like clear cuts, mountain-top mining, and other monstrosities from happening as often, if at all. This is especially true if the collective is maintained in a non-hierarchical fashion, eliminating the ability of cronies to bargain with bureaucrats for their mutual short-term gain.

Remember, the private and corporate gains of landlords, bosses, and usurers ultimately cost society. As Noam Chomsky points out, costs and risks under capitalism are socialized, while profits are privatized. This also occurs when labor, rather than being treated as a matter of individual control, to be exchanged freely by contract, is treated as a collective affair, and workers are not allowed to monetize their own contributions, to exchange with others, but are forced to accept loans with interest attached to them. A waste-free society, free from surpluses, depends on the recognition of the laborer’s individual
sovereignty, the collective sovereignty over land, and disobedience to illegitimate authority.

While an American worker may not be a surplus-holder relative to his or her fellow Americans, such as a boss or landlord, they are a surplus-holder relative to workers in third-world nations, whose labor forces suffer from artificial borders that restrict the free flow of their labor toward higher wages. Because of the imperialist and globalistic nature of American capitalism, all Americans are landlords, employers, and usurers in relation to third-world cultures, and the wastefulness of the American worker can be attributed to their also being collectively or nationally capitalists, and being afforded the ability to consume the products of third-world nations without paying the free market price. This free market price does not occur, because national borders do the same between nations that private property lines do between people: they allow the holder of the best land to extract rent from the others and, if coupled with financial control, to control their labor and production, and waste it.

Third world nations are workers relative to first world nations, who finance, employ, and extract resources from them. Borders and military threats keep workers in third world nations from coming to the first world and earning more from themselves, just as the office door divides the American worker from
their boss. Thus, all Americans profit from borders, but profit always exists as an externalization of costs onto others, is unethical and, as suggested before, wasteful. The wastefulness of the American worker can be attributed to their status as a beneficiary of imperialism and capitalist globalization.

If we are to create a sustainable future, without waste and want, which all of humanity can join in, capitalism must be ended not only between first world bosses and workers, landlords and tenants, lenders and debtors, or politicians and citizens, but between first and third worlders, as well. As Jacques Ellul would suggest, we need to “think globally, act locally,” challenging the power of governments and monopolists from the bottom, upward, not through violence or attack, but through community self-reliance and civil disobedience. The solution to larger problems can only be provided by the concerted civil disobedience from the lower and middle classes, for only when the workers of our nation take control can they affect foreign policy. The solution starts with you, and does not depend on governments or monopolists.
Decentralism, Appropriate Technology, and Permaculture

Decentralist community economics provides a way for local communities to maintain local control of their economic institutions and their income (so that it may be fairly divvied), and to express their cultural relationship to their local ecology. They are even better when coupled with E.F. Schumacher’s appropriate technology and Bill Mollison’s permaculture.

Appropriate technology is a challenge to the technologies of overscaled industries, which are maintained by governments as artificial monopolies, and are actually too large to be efficient. These are made more efficient by changing the energy supply, and making the technology smaller and easier to use. E.F. Schumacher described appropriate, human-scaled, or intermediate technology, as technology of production by the masses, making the best use of modern knowledge and experience, conducive to decentralization, compatible with laws of ecology, gentle in its use of scarce resources, and designed to serve the human person instead of making him the servant of machines.
When these factors of knowledge, decentralization, ecology, resource use, and humanity are not considered, there are hidden costs that are not being accounted for, and we all suffer for it in other ways, such as dehumanization and monotony at work, wastefulness, degradation of our environment, and depletion of resources. E.F. Schumacher suggests that he named the later-called appropriate technology

intermediate technology to signify that it is vastly superior to the primitive technology of bygone ages but at the same time much simpler, cheaper, and freer than the super-technologies of the rich. One can call it self-help technology or democratic or people's technology—a technology to which everyone can gain admittance and which is not reserved to those already rich and powerful.

Instead of focusing on heavy industry—which only seems efficient while monopolies are being created by the government and crony capitalists, and while people use government money for their exchanges,—appropriate technology focuses on technologies that are efficient when other factors, such as those named by Schumacher, are considered. As an example of the form it takes, appropriate technologists suggest that a bicycle is actually more efficient than walking or driving a car is for short-distance commutes,
because the bicycle uses fewer fuel calories than walking (when the distance is not too short, of course) or driving does and often requires less infrastructure. Only time considerations over longer distances or payloads make the use of cars or trucks more efficient in certain circumstances.

Many of our technologies are built too big and are very wasteful, both of resources and the human spirit. The problems facing appropriate technology, like the problems of big agriculture that face permaculturists and others, are created by government and big business working together to centralize production and distribution services, which allows them to extract a surplus from the population. Overscaled technology and industry is efficient from the point of view of big business and government, because it allows them to make more profits, interest, and taxes, and to more easily control the population. These are negative consequences for the workers and consumers, however, who find that these come at the cost of higher prices and lower wages. It costs everyone in the form of environmental degradation, but the rulers of the world and the leaders of industry seem contented to impose these long-term costs for short-term gains.

E.F. Schumacher believed appropriate technology to be a means by which workers
could move away from monotonous overspecialized jobs where they used oversized equipment throughout the day, and toward more diverse tasks, involving technologies that were smaller than their users, and could be controlled by them. This was seen as making technology work for people, instead of the other way around. When technology works for people, as he saw it, people remain in greater control of their own lives, and remain productive with their technologies. However, when people work for technology, monotony ensues, and unemployment happens because there are not enough technologies for people to work on or jobs to be given. These technologies were usually owned by unemployed idlers, as well, who remained in control of the surpluses the users of the technologies created. On this note, E.F. Schumacher states, “Let us look [...] at the meaning of ‘ownership’ or ‘property.’” He says,

As regards private property, the first and most basic distinction is between (a) property that is an aid to creative work and (b) property that is an alternative to it. There is something natural and healthy about the former—the private property of the working proprietor; and there is something unnatural and unhealthy about the latter—the private property of the passive owner who lives parasitically off of the work of others.
After quoting the Christian socialist, R.H. Tawney, on the matter, he continues, “Private enterprise carried on with property of the first category is automatically small-scale, personal, and local.” He says quite the opposite of the second category. It is clear from this sentiment that an economic shift toward worker-ownership and a technological shift toward human-scaled technology would be complementary, and could mutually-reinforce one another. Appropriate technologies can be used right alongside permaculture, even within permaculture systems, and both of these can be used to bring products to market in the local community.

What seems to be necessary is that these schools of thought work together toward common ends. Local economic institutions can promote and utilize appropriate technology and permaculture for productive ends in their own networks, and can provide access to land and credit for permaculture and appropriate technology-related projects. Community institutions can benefit from the use of appropriate technology and permaculture, as many of the technologies and practices of private and corporate businesses and governments—because they are overscaled—are inaccessible and inefficient to small producers and local communities. A community that is working toward cooperative self-reliance, then, may find that practicing
appropriate technology, decentralist economics, and permaculture together as a complementary and holistic system leads to the most beneficial results.\textsuperscript{11}

\section*{Where to Begin}

Weeds are often pioneer plants, which establish themselves in soils which have been stripped or ruined in some way, or which are being reclaimed from the deserts by the forbs of eventual grasslands. Bad soil results in weeds, which themselves build the soil up over time. They establish themselves until something better takes their place. Governments and monopolies are like weeds, in that they have established themselves in our earlier history in a time when the social terrain was barren, and as such they have pioneered human civilization. But because they are suited for the early stages of succession, they are also destined to be replaced by the later participants in the chain of development, just as forbs and grasses are eventually pushed out by trees and shrubs, as prairies are reclaimed by the spread of the forest.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} Other things, such as alternative architecture and community planning, should also make their way into the picture, as well as others that I have forgotten to mention.
\end{flushright}
Spreading ideas is like tending to the soil. You can’t grow anything without doing that first. Like a healthy soil culture, a healthy human culture is capable of fine production, and is made immune to pioneering weeds.

Without a healthy philosophical climate, one is limited to their own actions. Community economics is a social matter, however, and requires the concerted engagement of many people. One cannot be a community unto themself; it takes other people. So long as those people do not understand the importance of community economy, the conditions are not right, and community institutions cannot be built. Ideas are best spread by practice and demonstration of success, but community demonstration first requires communication and agreement between a sufficient number of people who are willing to act as cultural leaders. From agreement about the basic premises between these members, institutions can be constructed. For this reason, education has been a primary concern of community economists, with community institutions seen as an emergent result.

Because governments and monopolists are the ones who cause the biggest problems, it’s important not to get too caught up in reliance upon politicians or big business. This seems counter-intuitive, because we are used to thinking of politicians and businesspeople as
those who are the most capable of creating change, due to their access to resources. However, governments and big businesses are the very entities that benefit from things being the way they are. As I demonstrated using the law of supply and demand, by causing surpluses governments and big businesses can make others dependent on them and capture the wealth they create. That is, anyway, so long as there is a lack of understanding about the problem, and people willingly submit themselves to it; an issue which is exacerbated by the offenses of compulsory and strictly hierarchical education, which make a psychological offense of education, and keep people willfully ignorant outside of compulsory and top-down education.

People are conditioned to believe that their peers are in ready competition with them at all times, and that education can only come from “superiors.” You can demonstrate to them that education can occur outside of school walls, and can be a non-offensive, but respectful and participatory, affair, which they can engage in with great benefits, and that their peers are worth listening to. On your part, it requires a good deal of character and integrity, which you must elevate to an above-standard level, in order to establish the trust of your peers. If you aren’t going to have a suit and tie, and an office with a government-accredited degree posted on the wall from a
prestige university, then at the very least you must be an upstanding person, and someone that others can respect and admire, despite your lack of wealth or official recognition. You must live your own life in a way that reflects your values, to the degree they can be effected in today’s society, and which inspires others to join you. Work on your integrity, and carry it through in your social relationships as well. Seek out others who also want to live more honorably, and who value personal integrity, to work with, and help to nurture integrity and develop it in others.

As the ideas are spread—especially among the members of one’s own community— they can begin to be put to use, and networks and institutions can be formed. This can be as simple as a group forming a CSA (community-supported agriculture) and pooling money to get some healthy food from a sustainable farm or garden, or a communal tool-sharing cooperative, where members can share in the costs of storing and maintaining tools. It could take the form of a homeschooling, deschooling, or unschooling cooperative, to let parents who don’t want their kids indoctrinated and dehumanized in public schools— but who also don’t have all the time to school on their own— to take turns or pool resources to pay a teacher of their choice, and thereby to have more time, be it personal time or time necessary to keep a job up, or
whatever the conditions may call for. It could take the form of a land trust established for conservational or recreational group activities, or for living more sustainably with others. It could take the form of a credit union or mutual pawn shop, which provides secured loans without or at low interest to its members, so that they can make the purchases they need to be more productive; or a rotating credit circle that mutualizes the interest paid by members for their turns at the pot. It could take the form of a community-owned kitchen, where food is ordered in bulk (ideally from a CSA or similar) and prepared by volunteers or contractors in order to split costs and provide readily-available meals to the community. The possibilities are endless.

Once you have established an institution or two, start making connections between them as well as with the outside world. Create positive economic relationships between restaurant cooperatives and CSAs, for instance, or between a blacksmithing guild that utilizes appropriate technology to forge tools and a communal tool-sharing group. Keep these kinds of mutually-beneficial relationships in mind as you create your institutions, but be sure not to get overwhelmed and spread too thin. Ideally, we replace every hierarchical and compulsory institution that we interact with in our daily lives—grocery stores, restaurants, governments, etc.—with one that is member-
run and voluntary, but this is not something that happens overnight, but requires long and focused concentration. Rather than obsessing with absolutism, it’s best to consider the realistic and important changes that are actually possible. For some, this means leaving room for transitional institutions, that may be hierarchical or somewhat compulsory, but which are less so than the current system, and which share their surpluses more widely, such as ESOPs (employee stock option programs).

As you build economic relationships and institutions with others, it is important not to become a monopolist of ideas, but allow others to have a strong input in decisions (ideally by consensus), and challenge their willful ignorance by confronting them with group decisions that they must consider and engage in order to move forward. However, you must be prepared to present options, too, so as not to overwhelm the group with their newly-found mutual self-responsibility, and must be prepared to be the strongest influence while the others catch up. This, of course, will take a good use of your freshly-developed integrity, and will present you with challenges of your own. This is all part of the growing process: Cracked bones grow back stronger, so get up and walk it off. In some martial arts traditions, I am told, one trains by purposefully creating small chips to one’s shins, in order that one’s bones can better withstand impact, and that
pain may be better tolerated. Anyone who presents themselves as a challenge to authority would do best to adapt the mindset of the warrior, and be ready to get knocked down, and get back up.

What is possible will be different for everyone, depending on their social climate and their personal integrity. For instance, if you are the only one around who has an interest in community economics or permaculture, you probably have a good deal of education to promote. However, if you have many peers who share your interests, you may be able to get going on a project. Once the project is going, it largely takes over the process of education through the demonstration of success. Without personal integrity, not much at all can get done, except by appealing to government privileges and perpetuating the problems we are trying to solve. As Gandhi is often paraphrased, “Be the change you want to see in the world.”
Naturally, this short work will have left you with many questions. “What is to be done about such and such an issue?,” you may be wondering. In answer to this, I would like to encourage you to read into the works of the people mentioned here for yourself, as well as to participate in online discussion forums about the topics discussed. There are many excellent works on Georgism, mutualism, individualist anarchism, and distributism, as well as knowledgeable members of online communities who would be happy to address your questions. You’re also welcome to visit my website, evolutionofconsent.com, or e-mail me at will@evolutionofconsent.com with any questions or comments that you may have.
Bill Mollison quoted from *Permaculture, A Designers’ Manual, Introduction to Permaculture*, and in “Permaculture: Design for Living, Permaculture is more than a new way of gardening—it’s a sustainable way to live on planet Earth, an interview with Bill Mollison, by Alan AtKisson.”

E.F. Schumacher quoted from *Small is Beautiful*

Ralph Borsodi quoted from “A Decentralist Manifesto”

James J. Martin quoted from “Laurance Labadie, Selected Essays”

“The Effects of Price Freedom” by The Freeman, who gives permission to use the image with attribution.
Games

Solve the crossword puzzles and find the remaining words in the word search

COOPERATIVE
MUTUALISM
INTEREST
ABUNDANCE
CONFEDERATION
VOLUNTARY
BORSODI
EQUILIBRIUM
INTEGRITY
SUPPLY
SURPLUS
LABOR
SCHUMACHER
RENT
DEMAND
GEORGISM
LUDDITE
CAPITAL
SCARCITY
MEMBER-RUN
MUTUALIZATION
LAND
MOLLISON
PROFIT
Crossword 1

Down:

1. Not produced by labor, best owned in common
2. Best controlled by the individual
3. When used by multiple people, best cooperative or mutualized
4. Surplus payment due to land monopoly

Across:

1. Surplus payment due to monopoly on money and capital
2. Surplus payment due to monopoly on labor
Crossword 2

Down:

1. Sharing surplus with consumers
2. When prices are forced high
3. Not forced to participate
4. Directed by participants

Across:

1. Free market price
2. Producers
3. Consumers
4. When prices are forced low
5. When everyone gets what they need
Find the surplus!

There are four different campsites, and each one has a blackberry patch by it. However, campsite A naturally has 8 blackberry plants, B has 6, C has 4, and D has 2. Each plant produces the same number of blackberries.

In terms of blackberry plants, what is the ground rent for campsites A, B, C, and D? Use David Ricardo’s law of rent to find out!
Answers

Answers to **Crossword 1**:

Down: Land, Labor, Capital, Rent
Across: Interest, Profit

Answers to **Crossword 2**:

Down: Mutualization, Surplus, Voluntary, Member-run
Across: Equilibrium, Supply, Demand, Scarcity, Abundance

Answers to **Find the Surplus**:

A:6
B:4
C:2
D:0