

# *restraining the four horsemen*

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## FRANCES HUTCHINSON

### **The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century**

Susan George  
Pluto Press, London, 1999  
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'A brilliant, terrifying book which should be on the bedside table of every policy maker in the West'. (Victoria Brittain). Susan George's latest masterpiece represents the culmination of her 25 year battle to document the causes of hunger, famine, debt and structural adjustment. Titles such as *How the Other Half Dies* (1976), *Faith and Credit* (1994), *The Debt Boomerang* (1992) and *Fate Worse than Debt* (1987) have become best sellers. Now *The Lugano Report* presents a message which is at once stark and powerful. If Western 'civilisation' is to continue far into the 21st century, global corporations will need to take positive steps to preserve free market capitalism in the light of the disintegrating global environment.

The book is set out in the form of a report commissioned by 'one or two prominent, though informal groups'. Setting aside ethical considerations, the highly paid but anonymous working party of 'policy intellectuals' identify potential threats to the free-market capitalist system, examine the likely course of the world economy, and make recommendations of strategies necessary to ensure survival of the system. In her conclusion, the author states: '*The Lugano Report* is as accurate, sober and detached an assessment as serious research could make it. ... Aside from the basic conceit, nothing is made up and I would not be in the least surprised to learn that a similar document has actually been produced by a real-life Working Party.' Thoroughly researched, the Report is presented with clarity and perception.

The facts documented throughout the Report build a picture of rising populations, increasing ecological degradation accompanied by a sharp divergence between the interests of the affluent élites and the vast masses of 'losers' mainly, but not exclusively in the countries of the South. Although economic growth has heretofore been regarded as a 'good thing', unmanaged growth will give rise to unmanageable pressures on the environment, leading to economic chaos which would impact on rich and poor alike. The Working Party concludes that free-market capitalism can only survive if present population trends are reversed, and the world population is reduced by one third, from its present 6 billion to around 4 billion.

Deliberate mass exterminations would carry negative impacts on the economy and the environment, while being costly and politically unacceptable. The Working Party therefore advocates in meticulous detail the judicious management of naturally occurring 'Population Reduction Strategies' such that losers self-select or appear to be accidental victims of naturally occurring phenomena. Historically, population reduction has occurred through conquest, war, famine and pestilence, represented by the Four Horsemen of the

Apocalypse. The scope for building a consensus in favour of population reduction in the basis of ethical, economic, political and psychological strategies using the Four Horsemen is alarmingly realistic.

As George deftly demonstrates, leaders of global corporations and their transnational structures - the World Trade Organisation, European Round Table of Industrialists and the like - have the potential capacity to restrain the power of the Four Horsemen to their own ends. However, in my view it is most improbable that they would use it. They might conceivably limit the force of destruction by conquest, war, famine and pestilence to the 'illiterate, unemployable, superfluous' and 'degenerate' 'losers'. This might be done in order to maximise the numbers of surviving 'winners'. However, the quest to maintain 'business-as-usual' for future generations would necessitate the evolution of a form of corporate altruism hitherto virtually unknown. Short-term self-interest in the thrill of a vast gamble on the world's markets forms an unlikely precondition for development of a mature concern for the future of the wider community and its natural resource base.

This leaves the future in some degree of uncertainty. George's fascinating yet all-too-brief 'Annexe' rehearses the main arguments for taking immediate individual and collective responsibility for reweaving 'the social fabric that neo-liberalism is rending'. Realistically, George advocates withdrawal of economic activities from the transnational orbit to local small business enterprises, but within a national and global framework capable of over-riding the divisions of identity politics based on national, religious, political, gender, class, racial and other differences. At present, these divisions serve to perpetuate a system that is 'a universal machine for ravaging the environment and for producing losers that no one has a clue what to do with', providing excellent fodder for the Four Horsemen. The message emerging from George's excellent work is that the true enemy lies in the myriad divisions created by identity politics. While energies are directed towards single, divisive issues, corporate power remains unrestrained.

The fact remains we are all policy makers. George concludes: 'Left-leaning foundations have in my view shown stupidity bordering on the criminal in not defending – that is, putting money into – progressive ideas. The Working Party understands the importance of creating and using ideology.' Time to abandon the luxury of apportioning blame, in favour of shouldering the burden of collective responsibility.

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