

EPILOGUE

When we think of the world's future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction.¹

Ludwig Wittgenstein

We have travelled a long and difficult road together. We have reflected on problems of the greatest importance to people and countries in all parts of the world and humanity as a whole. We have done this by delving deeply into two very different types of ages: the economic age we are living in at present; and a cultural age struggling to be born.

The economic age is the age most people and countries are familiar with as a result of developments over the last two centuries and particularly over the last fifty years. While people in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East are not as familiar with this age as people in North America, Europe and Japan - either in terms of its incredible strengths or fundamental shortcomings - they are rapidly becoming familiar with it as a result of globalization, computerization, commercialization, capitalism, and international trade.

In the economic age, all the basic questions are economic questions. How is wealth created? How is it augmented from one year to the next? How can people increase their material and monetary wealth? How can people's economic needs be satisfied most effectively? How can economic growth be accelerated? How can profits and profit margins be enlarged? How can technology be improved? How can municipal, regional and national economies - and the global economy - be developed most efficiently? And how can international relations and foreign policy be conducted so that commercial, financial, industrial and trade objectives are maximized? These are the questions people, countries, governments, and international leaders are most concerned with at present, and have been most concerned with for some time.

In the process of coming to grips to these questions, economics and economies have been made the centrepiece of society and principal preoccupation of municipal, regional, national and international development. This is deemed to be the most effective way to deal with people's needs and wants in all areas of life - non-economic as well as economic - as well as make improvements in society, the human condition, and the world system. In order to realize these objectives, everything is drawn into the orbit of economics and given an economic orientation and justification - the environment, education, the

arts, the sciences, communications, commerce, business, industry, agriculture, politics, technology, recreation, spirituality, and social affairs.

The theoretical and practical foundations for the economic age were laid in 1776 when Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* was published. However, it was not until the middle part of the nineteenth century when Karl Marx appeared on the scene that the historical and philosophical justifications were provided for it. This occurred when Marx claimed that economics is the "cause" and "basis" of everything else, primarily through the economic interpretation of history. Since that time, the large majority of developments in the world - and certainly all the major developments - have been concerned with fleshing out this conviction and making it a reality. As a result, the economic age is now so powerful and pervasive that it taken for granted and rarely if ever discussed. Everywhere it is assumed that as economics and economies go, so goes the world.

While the economic age has produced countless benefits - particularly for people and countries in the western world - it is not without its problems. By failing to take nature and the natural environment into account in public and private policies, planning, and decision-making, it has propelled the globe's fragile eco-system to the verge of collapse. By condoning the exponential use of scarce renewable and non-renewable resources, it has contributed to the depletion of the world's natural resource base at an alarming rate. By yielding huge inequalities in income and wealth between the rich and poor countries and rich and poor people, it has vaulted humanity to the brink of disaster. And by placing a much higher priority on products, production, profits, consumption and the marketplace than on people and human welfare and well-being, it has turned citizens into consumers and made it impossible to achieve "development with a human face."

While it is imperative to make changes in the economic age whenever and wherever possible, the aforementioned problems will not be successfully addressed as long as the economic age is perpetuated. In fact, the longer the economic age is perpetuated, the more dangerous the consequences will be. This situation will be compounded as world population increases and the finite carrying capacity of the earth is approached. This will cause a great deal more hardship, conflict, confrontation and violence in the world since people will be forced to fight for resources that are shrinking rather than expanding, as well as an economic pie that is diminishing or increasing more slowly than population growth. This is a recipe for social, political, and environmental disaster, as it will push humanity and the world much closer to the breaking point.

If problems as acute, debilitating, and potentially life-threatening as these are to be dealt with effectively in the future, it will be necessary to make the transition to a different kind of age. This age must be capable of incorporating the economic age - and a great deal else - in a broader, deeper and more

fundamental way of looking at life, living, reality, development, the world system, and the human condition. It must also be capable of creating an entirely new relationship between human beings and the natural environment, as well as establishing more effective theoretical, practical, historical and philosophical foundations for the world system of the future. Without this, the prospects for improvements in the quality of life and human condition are bleak indeed.

The age that possesses the greatest potential to do this is a cultural age. The key to realizing this age lies in making culture and cultures - rather than economics and economies - the centrepiece of society and principal preoccupation of municipal, regional, national and international development. Not only is this consistent with reality, the human condition, historical developments, and the contemporary situation - it is culture and cultures after all that are concerned with the total ways of life of people and ends as well as means - but also it is consistent with the need to achieve harmony and balance between commercial, industrial, financial and technological needs on the one hand and artistic, scientific, social, educational, recreational, religious and spiritual needs on the other hand. This is imperative if humanity is to go fruitfully into the future and make sensible and sustainable decisions about future directions in planetary civilization.

In a cultural age, all the basic questions are cultural questions. How can the total spectrum of people's needs be met? How can people live creative, constructive and fulfilling lives? How can people participate actively - and fully - in the cultural life of the family, the community, the region, the nation, and the world? How can poverty, hunger, homelessness and unemployment be overcome? How can the gap between rich and poor people and rich and poor countries be closed? How can peace and harmony be achieved in the world? How can violence, terrorism, racism and nationalism be stamped out? What are the most appropriate roles and responsibilities for governments, corporations, international organizations, the cultural community, and citizens in a cultural age? How can a world system be created that places the priority on people and matters of human welfare and well-being rather than profits, products, consumption and the marketplace? And most importantly, how can harmonious relationships be established between people and the natural environment? These are the tough and demanding questions that must be asked - and answered - if a cultural age is to become a full-fledged reality and function effectively in the world.

In seeking answers to these questions, a great deal will be accomplished if governments, corporations and international organizations make a full commitment to a cultural age. In order to do this, they will have to take a holistic and equitable approach to development, the world system, and the human condition. This approach must be capable of coming to grips with the totality of human needs, as well as achieve balanced and harmonious relationships between economics and the environment, socialism and capitalism, consumption and

conservation, cooperation and competition, humanism and materialism, and secularism and spiritualism.

If governments, corporations and international institutions have a strategic role to play in the realization and flowering of a cultural age, so does the cultural community. It will have to spearhead the renaissance that is so badly needed in the future. In order to achieve this, the community will have to be much more cohesive and consolidated than it is today. It will also have to be much more vocal. As Melina Mercouri, former actress and Culture Minister for Greece, put it:

It is time for our voice to be heard as loud as that of the technocrats. Culture, art and creativity are not less important than technology, commerce and the economy.²

While the cultural community, governments, corporations and international organizations have a key role to play in the creation and blossoming of a cultural age, the most important role is reserved for people. The world situation will not change, and change significantly, until people engage fully and actively in the quest to change it. They can do this by taking a cultural approach to life. We can call this anything we like - cultural citizenship, deep culture, a cultural renaissance, making the transition from an economic age to a cultural age, or designing and developing communities, countries, continents, and the world as cultures and works of art. But it all boils down to one thing in the end. It boils down to seeing life, living, development and the world system from a cultural perspective. When this happens, culture is far more than a career, a profession, or a vocation. It is a way of life - a way of life that runs the whole gamut of possibilities, from how people visualize and interpret the world to how they organize themselves, conduct their affairs, elevate and embellish life, and position themselves in the world.

With exemplary action coming from people, the cultural community, and governments, corporations and international organizations, it is possible to see the pale outlines and basic contours of a cultural age. Based on developing culture and cultures in breadth and depth and taking the necessary precautions and safeguards, it is an age based on ensuring that culture's highest, wisest and most enduring values, principles and ideals - the quest for equality, justice, freedom and truth, the love of knowledge, wisdom and beauty, the need for stability, order, security, diversity and unity, respect for the rights and needs of others, the importance of caring, sharing, compassion and cooperation, and especially creativity, excellence and the search for the sublime - receive the attention and priority they deserve in public and private policies, practices, and decision-making processes.

An age based on values, principles and ideals as compelling and quintessential as these would be an exciting age indeed. It would confirm the

fact that artistic creation, scientific discovery, respect for nature, the natural environment and other species, education, life-long learning, spirituality, friendship, solidarity, family life and human love are the most essential things in life - the things that are remembered long after everything else is forgotten. Not only do these things bring real fulfillment, happiness, and wealth in life, but also they promote peace, stability, harmony and security in the world.

As the great Indonesian cultural philosopher and scholar, Takdir Alisjahbana, put it recently:

In the great movement of time which we call human history, we must ask ourselves the question, “Where are we, and where is our road leading to?” in the hope that through an understanding of the growths and declines, of the successes and the failures of cultures, we will acquire some clues that will lead us to the right decisions in our time.³

Let us hope that we discover the clues that are necessary to make “the right decisions in our time.” For what is at stake here is the quality of life, environmental sustainability, and human welfare and human well-being in the future. This is why making the transition from an economic age to a cultural age is so essential. The future of humanity and the world depend on it.

ENDNOTES

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Edited by G. H. Von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, Translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3e.
2. Melina Mercouri, Speech to the First Informal Meeting of Culture Ministers of the European Union, November 1983, Athens, Greece, as reported in Canadian Conference of the Arts, *Blizzard*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2000 (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of the Arts, 2000), p. 6.
3. S Takdir Alisjahbana, *Socio-Cultural Creativity in the Converging and Restructuring Process of the New Emerging World* (Jakarta: : P.T. Dian Rakyat, Pulo Gadung: 1983), pp. 12-13.