

Background to Douglas' Philosophy

Today, economic growth rides roughshod over the earth, devastating the natural environment and sustainable rural economies in the third world and Eastern Europe. Local power over local resources is increasingly swept aside by money power exercised from a distance. Farmers are lured into accepting loans, for machinery, fertilisers and 'improved' seeds, and face falling financial returns from the sale of cash crops grown for export. Centralisation of financial control is not, however, inevitable. For practical change to occur it is necessary for ordinary people in their individual localities to take stock of their resources, both in terms of materials and skills, so that we, each and every one of us, cease to participate in the war against nature and society. The analysis of the political economy presented by Douglas in books, articles, public addresses and radio broadcasts between 1918 and 1952 remains a rich resource for the development of a socially just and ecologically sustainable world economy.

A key problem exists in the artificial divisions between scientific and artistic world views, divisions which Rudolf Steiner sought to overcome through his extensive lectures and publications. For Douglas, the biggest danger comes from the powerful would-be reformer seeking to impose his / her version of Utopia on a powerless community. The way forward is for individuals to take time out to study good works, reflect and experiment with local economic alternatives. For that to happen, a Basic (or Citizens') Income for all – which could be introduced overnight – would be of incalculable value. The quest is not to eliminate industrial progress, but to use appropriate technologies to conserve local skills and resources free from enforced slavery to an unsustainable global economy.