

## Commentary on *Asses in Clover*

Frances Hutchinson

### O'Duffy in Context

The quest of Cuanduine in *Asses in Clover* is a quest by the author to save humanity from the folly of 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare and its accompanying spiritual, cultural and ecological degradation. Born in Dublin in 1893, O'Duffy wrote his Cuanduine trilogy with vivid memories of the evils of World War I and the Easter Rising. In 1925 he left Dublin with his wife and two young children, moving to England but spending some time freelancing in Paris and working for an American newspaper. These moves are reflected in the trilogy as a whole, but especially in *Asses*.

The trilogy starts with the Dublin Philosopher who contrasts the banality and ugliness of materialistic 'progress' with the beauty of God's creation. In Book I, *King Goshawk and the Birds*, the Philosopher is outraged to read the following newspaper report:

#### 'GOSHAWK BUYS BIRDS WHEAT KING'S LATEST ENTERPRISE

A New York message just received states that King Goshawk has completed negotiations for the purchase of all the blackbirds, robins, larks, and nightingales in the world. The vast bulk of these will be removed at an early date to the great park of Goshawk Palace, but a few will be kept in aviaries near the principal cities for the delectation of their inhabitants.

On King Goshawk's well-known principle that "Anything free is not valued", it is understood that there will be a small charge for admission to these aviaries.

King Goshawk deserves the gratitude of the public for having thus taken one more step in harnessing Nature to the service of mankind.'

To right this wrong, the Philosopher seeks supernatural aid, attempting first to enlist the support of Socrates. The spirit of Socrates is engaged in the pursuit of truth and the contemplation of God, and has no desire to save humanity from its follies. However, the Philosopher describes the final folly, the purchase of the song-birds and the imposition of a charge to hear them sing. At this, the spirit of Socrates at last flies into a fury:

A robin redbreast in a cage  
Puts all heaven in a rage.

What is needed is not a philosopher, but a hero from Tir na nOg, the third heaven of Irish mythology. The spirits of the heroes were to be found walking in the meadows of asphodel in Tir na nOg.

'They were not like the spirit of Socrates, which resembled a still flame; but they had the forms of men, glorious and ethereal. A hero is a person of superabundant vitality and predominant will, with no sense of responsibility or humour, which makes him a nuisance on earth; but he is in his element in the third heaven. There the heroes take themselves and one another at their own

valuation, regarding their weaknesses as strength, their defects as merits. Their life is in their fame: every time an earthly orator recites their names they experience a thrill of pleasure; if they are forgotten they die.'

Searching among many heroic figures, the Philosopher finds Cuchulain, and announces that he has come from Earth to find him.

“What is your errand?” asked Cuchulain.

“Man,” said the Philosopher, “is full of wickedness and folly.”

“True,” said Cuchulain. “Tell me what wickedness and folly he has done since I left the earth.”

“In the first place,” said the Philosopher, “he has never done fighting and killing.”

“That,” said Cuchulain, “is foolish, but it is not wicked. I fought and killed many in my time on earth. I am since convinced of folly, but I am clear of guilt.”

“In those days,” said the mind of the Philosopher, “men fought with men in hot blood, hand to hand, strength against strength, feat against feat, and knowing well what it was they were fighting for. But for many centuries they have been possessed of a devilish powder which enables them to kill at a distance; and by labouring hard at its improvement they have learned how to kill without seeing one another at all. So that now when countries are at war they do not send forth armies, but each hurls millions of missiles over mountains and seas at the other, destroying lands and cities, men, women and children, until one or other is utterly overwhelmed. Some of these missiles are so cunningly devised that when they hit they divide up into thousands of particles which riddle and macerate the body; others contain deadly poisons; others scatter the contagion of leprosy and such foul diseases through the air; others on bursting are converted into fine dust which is borne on the wind and blinds every eye in which it finds lodgement. They inflict on each other besides a thousand more abominations of which I cannot tell you, for already I grow weaker and must soon yield to the earthward pull of my body. But you must know this also, that nobody ever knows the real cause or meaning of these wars, and that if anyone asks he is immediately put to silence.”

‘Said the spirit of Cuchulain: “This is indeed a most iniquitous way of fighting. But is the tale of man’s wickedness complete?”

“No,” said the Philosopher. “That is only the beginning. While the many are thus fighting, the few are contriving against their liberties, and robbing them of their bread and their homes, so that all the wealth of the world has now passed into the hands of usurers. And at last, infamy of infamies, these have begun to covet the beauty of the world as well.” Then he told Cuchulain of the bird-purchase of King Goshawk; and at that the hero was thrown into a rage surpassing even that of Socrates.

“Enough!” said he. “I will rest here no longer. Let us to earth at once.””

The weapons of war to which O’Duffy refers are those used in World War I. Nuclear weapons and other sophisticated weapons systems used during World War II and subsequently, were yet to be devised. Equally, the privatisation of access to nature, in the form of nature reserves, theme parks and tourism were still virtually unknown. In *King Goshawk and the Birds* O’Duffy romps philosophically through social and economic life in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the course of the book the hero of *Asses in Clover*, Cuanduine (Cu an Duine, the Hound of Man) son of Cuchulain takes over the Philosopher’s quest from his father.

After writing the second book in the trilogy, *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street* (1925), O’Duffy came across the social credit economics of Clifford Hugh Douglas. His non-fiction text, *Life and Money: Being a Critical Examination of the Principles and Practice of*

*Orthodox Economics with A Practical Scheme to End the Muddle it has made of our Civilisation*, contains quotations from economists, politicians and other leading personalities of the times, whose words are put into the mouths of the fictional characters of *Asses in Clover*.

A mere hundred years before O'Duffy's birth, the French Revolution, with the execution of Louis XVI and his Queen Marie Antoinette, ended the 'age of chivalry', ushering in, as Edmund Burke termed it, the age of 'sophisters, economists and calculators' of the secular state. In Britain, the break up of the Church/State alliance can be traced back to the Tudors and the Reformation. With the execution of Charles I by a *secular* authority, rather than a rival contender to the throne, the affinity of the interests of church, monarch and commons started to disintegrate. Henceforth, secular contenders for power sought popularity under the pretext of curbing the power of kings, priests and the aristocracy. Secular 'progress' was imposed from above, as the state outlawed religious practices which could otherwise undermine positions of power carved out by ambitious rulers and their powerful merchants, adventurers and other supporters. Hence Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), for example, burned churches, murdered priests and forbade the celebration of Christian feast days on the sole authority of secular law backed by armed force.

Cromwell's Commonwealth ushered in the age of secular materialism, in which personal and political decisions were made on the guiding principle of pure self-interest. The citizen became 'free' to vote according to their own best interests. As employer or employee they were now able to put personal gain, measured in terms of money, above all other considerations. Factions, parties and interest groups vied with each other to have their own interests endorsed in law. The result was an unprecedented change in humanity's ability to alter its material surroundings through the development of new science and technologies. The change was, however, accompanied by an unprecedented failure of individuals to assume responsibility for, or even to take account of, the resultant damage to the earth.

The radical changes in humanity's impact upon ecological patterns occurred over a relatively short timespan. News of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo was carried to London by messengers travelling by horse and sea. It would be almost a further half century before steam railways and a network of telegraphic communications linked European countries, and even longer before motorised land and air transport started to create a global economy. When the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815, for most people in Europe the decisions relating to everyday life were scarcely, if at all, regulated by the money economy. Bank 'holidays' were yet to replace traditional holy days as times for relaxation from paid employment. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries most people could identify from within their local geographical area the sources of their basic necessities in terms of food, clothing, fuel and furnishings. Decisions about usefulness, durability and appearance of goods produced were taken by producers who were themselves consumers, or known personally to their customers. 'The market', regulated by money price, did not as yet dominate everyday life.

As the scale of production of material artefacts continued to increase over the decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the purpose of constantly increasing productive capacity became lost in the confusions of wars and change. As O'Duffy wrote it was obvious to many that the ever-increasing scale of production for the sake of keeping the economy going so that people could find 'work' which had become the sole means of access to an income, was the result of flawed thinking, or, more accurately, the total absence of constructive thought. The churning out of fashion items for the home and for personal adornment was already dependent upon a system of artificially induced discontent created by the advertising and film industries. The constant search for markets, and for cheap sources of economic inputs, as so humorously described by O'Duffy, continues unabated to

this day. The massive scale of production of armaments, together with the dangers and ugliness of the nuclear and petrochemical industries have in no way lessened the force of O'Duffy's case.

Humanity's continued failure to move beyond the narrow self-interested individualism which heralded the machine age threatens its survival every bit as surely in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it did in the 1930s. O'Duffy brilliantly debunks the meaningless capitalism *versus* socialism 'debate' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His hero, Cuanduine, defeats the king capitalist with a view to freeing the birds. Most sections of the world's press are guardedly approving:

*The Socialist press, on the other hand, showed marked disapprobation of Cuanduine's action. To restore the birds to alleged freedom under national capitalist governments was, they said, merely to bolster up the existing state of things. Birds were confirmed individualists, and sang for their own enjoyment. They should therefore be kept under the control of an international bureau, and trained to sing for the enjoyment of the proletariat.* (p231)

Working for money on the orders of an employer has come to be regarded as the normal, natural state of affairs for the whole of humanity. Economic servility creates individuals who have no duty to think beyond the necessity to earn a money income from whichever source it is offered.

The culmination of a process of change from communal interdependence to irresponsible individualism, has created a world economy regulated purely by money and money values. Vast sums of money, measured in trillions of dollars, wash digitally around the world every day, seemingly out of control. Media and advertising companies bid for attention, while matters of law and governance are determined by financial interests. When the glittering illusion is examined in the cold light of day, it becomes apparent that all human life depends upon co-operation between human beings using resources provided by the natural world. The entire wealth-creation process is a co-operative one. The task is not to seek nostalgically for a past golden age, but to make conscious use of the resources and institutional patterns created in the process of industrialisation.

The financial system which has evolved over the past two centuries is, however, beyond intelligent human control.

*(We ought not to let money merely flow into circulation and give it freedom to do what it likes. For we thereby do something very peculiar in the economic life. If we require animals for some kind of labour, the first thing we do is to tame them. Think how long a riding horse has to be tamed before it can be used. Think what would happen if we did not tame our animals, but used them wild, taking no pains to tame them. But we let money circulate quite wildly in the economic process.* (Steiner: *World Economy*, p156)

The first step towards taming finance is to recognise the necessity to do so. Money is a man-made creation: it can therefore be brought under social control. The 'Philosophers' and 'Cuanduines' of today who question the folly of allowing finance to dominate personal and public policy formation continue to face the same reaction from workers and 'experts' as those so comically voiced in *Asses in Clover*. Being content to work for money, people remain like 'asses in clover', finding the material rewards satisfying. Meanwhile the 'experts' remain united in agreement that all alternatives have been tried and found wanting.

At the end of the book, O'Duffy contrasts the emerging dystopian world economy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a Selenite social credit Utopia. In so doing he draws upon the guild socialist and social credit political economic thought of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (See *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*) which resonated with the work of contemporary

social thinkers, including Steiner. Like the best Utopian writing, O’Duffy’s Cuanduine trilogy offers the inspiration to explore rational alternatives for thinkers who recognise the long-run unsustainability of global corporatism. In the Commentary we follow up the pointers left by O’Duffy and others in the quest for practical approaches to reform of a dysfunctional world economy based on the free play of unbridled self-interest.

### **Eimar O’Duffy on National Dividend/Basic Income**

(Extracts taken from *Life and Money* (1932))

In 1932 Eimar O’Duffy observed that by producing plenty, farmers and manufacturers had brought down prices. As a result, people were thrown out of work, so that they could not buy the plentiful supply of goods or enjoy increasing leisure. Flawed economic theories dictated that incomes from wages could not be replaced by a ‘national dividend’ so that all could benefit from the general increase in wealth resulting from adoption of the new technologies. O’Duffy commented:

“But if you pay people for being idle, how can you get them to work?”

“I knew that ancient wheeze was coming. Do you really think that a large part of mankind will be content to idle on a basic income when they can earn their present wages *in addition* by working? All normal people get bored by prolonged idleness. That is why the daughters of the idle rich set up hat shops”.

“But what of those who *prefer* to idle? Let them idle. At present we carry millions of unwilling idlers on our backs. The willing idlers will be fewer; and to punish them by denying them their income will be no remedy. It would merely restore that poverty, with all its attendant evils for society, which it is our prime purpose to remove. If a man has a contagious disease, you don’t worry whether it is his own fault, but cure him in spite of himself in the interests of society in general. Poverty is more destructive and infectious than any disease.

“Moreover, it is not the function of an economic system to punish anybody. You don’t expect it to punish murderers or thieves: that is the business of the law. The present economic system does not punish idlers except accidentally: on the contrary, some of its richest rewards go to idlers. The business of an economic system, like that of a shopkeeper, is to deliver the goods, not to reform the customer.”

O’Duffy explained the case for a secure income for all on the following grounds:

“The Socialist says: ‘Nobody should have an unearned income.’ Social Credit says: Everybody should have an unearned income: **and it is there waiting for him.**”

“That unearned income will be an equal share [regardless of wages and salaries] in that potential surplus of goods due to the productivity and economy of modern machinery as compared with hand labour. It is our share in the bounty of nature, and our heritage in the work of our ancestors. **Nobody ever produces anything entirely by his own efforts.** He is always assisted by natural forces, accumulated knowledge, and the organisation of society. Take the case of a man growing cabbages in his own back garden. He gets the sunlight, the wind and the rain free. He owes his spade to the remote ancestors who first smelted iron and thought out and improved the implement (he cannot claim to have paid for all that with seven-and-sixpence [£20 in present terms]). Then the qualities of the cabbage itself, latent in the seed for which he has paid three pence a packet

[70p], are the result of countless experiments of which he knows nothing. Finally, the whole organisation of society is behind him to secure him in the possession of his crop. If this is true of such a simple thing as a cabbage plot, how much more does it apply to the complicated processes of modern industry. There is no such thing, in short, as a self-made man. We all help to make one another, and none of us does more than to contribute some small addition to the accumulated wealth of society. No need to inquire into merits and demerits. You cannot deny the inheritance to anybody without injuring everybody.

“Remember, too, that we are lifting from the vast body of the nation that burden of anxiety under which every worker in every sphere of life is now compelled to labour – the haunting dread of what will become of them if, for one reason or another, their work shall cease to be needed. For what with rationalisations, amalgamations, efficiency campaigns and economy drives, scarcely a single job can be considered really safe. And, of course, the old enemies, sickness and death, remain with us ever. ...

“Remember, finally, that we are not primarily concerned with the benevolent purpose of relieving suffering. We have arrived at this conclusion as a result of scientific reasoning with the object of making the economic machine function properly. This free gift is not charity: it is oil in the wheels of the machine. In bestowing it we are showing no more benevolence than a motorist does when he oils his engine.” (p108)

The fictional *Asses in Clover* covers the same points as those made in *Life and Money* with a great deal more insightful humour than can be found in the tomes of the ‘dismal science’ as taught in institutions of education.

### **Introducing *Asses in Clover***

#### Summary of the story-line

In *Asses in Clover* O’Duffy continues his satirical saga of a world dominated by money. One of the birds imprisoned in a theme park aviary has escaped. It flies to Ireland, where the locals are so delighted to hear bird song once more that they refuse to obey the demand for it to be returned. Goshawk and his corporate world mount a massive attack upon Ireland, intending to devastate the country with ghastly weapons of mass destruction. Cuanduine goes to Ireland and, with the aid of supernatural powers, constructs a great airplane. In a brilliant battle scene he destroys Goshawk’s entire air force, after which he crosses the ocean to attack Goshawk’s castle. Although Goshawk is destroyed, his financial advisor is spared. Mr. Slawmy Cander, being the real power in the world, continues to obscure the issues, making it impossible for Cuanduine to liberate the birds. Cuanduine returns to his wife, only to discover that in his absence his children have become creatures of materialism. In disgust, Cuanduine and his wife fly away, leaving the world to its own devices. In the final six chapters the logical fallacies of finance-centred growth economics are explored to their logical conclusions.

#### Social credit economics

Unfortunately, as a literary work, *Asses in Clover* falls far short of the first two books in O’Duffy’s trilogy. *King Goshawk and the Birds* and *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street* continue to be read by students of Irish literature and Utopian studies. Already a sick man when he came to write *Asses in Clover*, at times the author allows the preacher to overcome the artist. The book is poorly constructed, in places becoming a rant about the options open to the

‘man in the street’ under an economic system dominated by finance and materialism. Nevertheless, the book explores economic issues far more comprehensibly than an economics textbook.

*Asses in Clover* is a fictional interpretation of the themes explored in *Life and Money*, now long out of print. However, the main themes of social credit economics, together with the history of the world-wide social credit movement, are documented in *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism* (Frances Hutchinson and Brian Burkitt, Jon Carpenter Publishing, 2005). Throughout this commentary, therefore, the reader is referred to the *Political Economy (PE)* for supporting factual documentation on social credit.

As O’Duffy wrote *Asses in Clover*, personal memories of the horrors of World War I still loomed large. The dead alone numbered at least nine million soldiers, sailors and airmen, plus five million civilians who perished as a result of occupation, bombardment, hunger and disease. Throughout Europe most people counted at least one person among their friends and relations who had suffered death or injury as a result of the war. Although few could say exactly what the war was all about, the money had been found to produce weapons to destroy buildings, kill and maim, while military personnel were fed, clothed and transported to the scenes of battle. After the war, however, no money could be found to provide ordinary civilians with basic economic security. For O’Duffy and his target readership, an economic system which produced poverty, unemployment, waste and war needed to be critically examined.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has left a legacy of the history of two world wars and an on-going war against the natural environment and humanity itself. The root cause of the trouble can be traced to an economic system seemingly beyond human control. It is suggested here that a study of *Asses in Clover* may prove a more fruitful means of coming to an understanding of the economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than would result from a study of standard economics textbooks. At least the story is peppered by passages of sparkling humour.

#### Book 1, Chapter 1

O’Duffy sets the scene. The global corporate ‘kings’ have replaced traditional kings and rulers of nations. Rather than working *with* the people and caring *for* the land as the source of their common livelihood, the corporate heads dictate from above what will happen in their empires. Divine guidance is replaced by the guidelines of sound finance. The unseen power behind the throne seeks to create scarcity in order to profit financially from hardship. Hence natural events giving rise to good harvests, and technological advances which create plenty, are economically disastrous.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially during the 1920s and 1930s, it was sound economic policy to destroy food crops and other resources in order to keep prices high, despite the fact that millions lived in grinding poverty. The formal education system, the press and the media serve to obscure rather than illuminate the causes of the underlying malaise. Orthodox economics is not about satisfying need in a world of plenty, but about pandering to greed, selfishness and self-interest of the individual and the corporate world in which they work. Global corporatism has created a world of financial and concrete material infra-structures capable of existing in a parasitic relationship with the real world of nature and community.

O’Duffy follows the economist Clifford Hugh Douglas in identifying an outdated financial system as the root cause of many of the problems encountered by ordinary people in their everyday lives as producers and consumers, *i.e.* economic agents. Under the financial system of

industrial capitalism, labour becomes a commodity to be bought and sold on the market, while the market becomes virtually the sole means of access to the produce of the land and its people. Labour, skills, land, raw materials, transport, administration, machinery and know-how are combined in a series of complex arrangements over space and time. In the process of these developments finance becomes the dominant factor in the economy. The availability or non-availability of money determines how the resources of the economy will be combined and to what ends. Nearly every action which takes place in the developed world is inspired by money or is related to money in some way. However, as Douglas explained in the immediate aftermath of World War I:

*Although most of the business world lives for money, works for money, dreams of money, and will die and condemn millions of others to death for money, not one person in ten thousand, at a very conservative estimate, has any grasp of the real relation of money to goods and services. Few have any conception of the method by which modifications in the money system can and do divert the current of productive energy supplied by skill, science, and labour into alternative channels of enterprise* (Douglas quoted in PE).

As Douglas further explained, the drive for economic growth is inherently finance driven. However, finance itself is a commodity which can be bought and sold on the market. The whole system of money broking and credit issue is conducted for motives which have very little to do with raising general living standards, increasing opportunities for self-development or creating good work and ecological sustainability. Bankers and financiers are not to blame, however. They at least are consistent in their motivations. In the 1920s and 1930s the target audience of Douglas and O’Duffy is the person in the street who, as producer, consumer and citizen can choose whether or not to continue to endorse the actions of the powerful players.

#### Book I, Chapters II - VI

From the perspective of the 1930s, O’Duffy predicted with uncanny accuracy the curious economics of industrial capitalist society. From the 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, advertising, shopping malls, electronic communications, Commercial (Prosperity) Christianity, the “sound economics of the financial inquisition”, “hard work and scarcity in the name of progress” are such well-enshrined facts of everyday life. In the 1930s they could still be regarded with scepticism,

Under corporate capitalism, production and income distribution in the form of finance have come to be regarded as inextricably linked. However, since science, technology and industrialisation generally can create a vast abundance of consumer goods, it seems absurd that citizens can only buy goods if they first become employees working for a wage or salary. The rules of ‘sound finance’ dictate that more production is necessary before incomes can be distributed, ignoring the fact that new technologies allow an abundance of goods to be produced with a minimum of effort. The result is unemployment, with its failure to give access to the plentiful goods, or the invention of forms of unnecessary work so that incomes can be distributed. These chapters pre-date Keynes’ (1936) attempt at an explanation in his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. With greater comprehensibility and humour, O’Duffy explores absurdities which result when production is determined by financial profitability, forcing people to remain dependent upon employment in ‘financially sound’ forms of production for the basic necessities of life.

In Chapter II toil and scarcity are portrayed as the driving forces behind economic progress and financial accountability, receiving the full endorsement of the press and the churches. Chapter III continues the theme of the centralisation of power and the supremacy of money values which became established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ‘privatisation’ of the “song birds and wild flowers”,

which represent the natural world and all its resources, has been undertaken by purchases using money created out of nothing by Cander, the financial advisor. People have now to seek work in the formal money economy in order to obtain an income to buy the basic necessities of life. However, if production is plentiful and prices fall, the corporate world does not have enough money to offer employment to all. Keynes advocated the creation of work through public finance of infrastructure building schemes, a solution not immediately deemed in accordance with the rules of 'sound finance'. Later in the book (page 233) the nature and origins of the banking system which dispenses finance are outlined.

Chapters IV and V romp around the social mores associated with money: *asking* for money is wrong, no matter how justified the request might be, while *working* for money comes to dictate even the very patterns of family life. In Chapter VI the 'man-in-the-street' character, Mac ui Rudai, is introduced. All he wants are the basic necessities of life, while in return he is ready to do anything an employer will tell him to. As the book progresses it emerges that Mac is prepared not only to farm, build or work machinery but also kill, or to design deadly weapons of mass destruction. For him short-term, unreflecting self-interest is the dominant motivation. Mac is the anti-hero, representing all of us who are prepared to turn our hand to whatever the economic system, dominated by sound finance, demands. Without him/her/us, the juggernaut that is global corporatism would grind to a halt.

#### Book 1, Chapters VII - XI

In Chapter VII the financial causes of poverty amidst plenty are introduced, alongside the economics experts who have many different ways of explaining why the practical problems of the real world economy are inherently insolvable. Using statistical jargon, the "science of economics" explains precisely why the obvious solutions to clearly identified problems cannot be entertained. In clear and simple language: "Man cannot control the laws of economics. They control him." The different economists, in their varying styles and language, present the same conclusions: there is no alternative but to obey the rules of "sound finance". If there is too much food, there will be no work to do, so prices will fall and taxes will rise. Re-distribution of the existing 'cake' would only give crumbs to everybody, whilst taking away incentives, so all must work harder to increase the size of the existing cake. Over-production and over-population are the causes of unemployment and poverty. Another way to see the problem is to identify a disequilibrium between savings and investment. In the 1920s and 1930s, as now, all these points of view were being canvassed quite seriously by professional economists. 'Economists' are people schooled in orthodoxy within the universities. Those who do not toe the mainstream line are not employed to teach economics, nor are they accepted by the mainstream political parties of right or left. Though there is disagreement about the relative impact of different causes, all orthodox economists agree that any solution will fail if it does not follow the rules of sound finance.

Throughout *Asses in Clover*, O'Duffy's economists are repeating actual quotations from contemporary speeches and newspaper articles by leading politicians and economists, as referenced in O'Duffy's *Life and Money*. After quoting from Keynes' *Treatise on Money* (Vol.2, p189) and other contemporary documents, O'Duffy quotes from Sir William Beveridge's 19<sup>th</sup> May 1931 "wireless" talk on Unemployment:

*Some degree of unemployment, or at least some risk of unemployment, was probably an essential part of economic health for the community. A society in which every individual was absolutely sure of never losing his job, would be a society without any change at all – a dead body, not a live one. (Daily News, May 20<sup>th</sup> 1931, quoted in O'Duffy's Life and Money, p217-8).*

O'Duffy comments on the above quotation:

*After making the general comment that this is (a) cant, and (b) bolstering up bad economics with worse biology (Sir William seems to have got hold of what Shaw calls 'just that corner of evolution that a black-beetle can understand'), I should like to put these questions to this distinguished authority:*

1. *If unemployment is a disease, how can the unemployment of individuals be an essential part of economic health for the community?*
2. *What 'degree of unemployment' confers a state of communal health?*
3. *If unemployment is a disease, how could a society freed from disease be a dead society?*

*Sir William Beveridge is a world-famous economist, and a specialist on unemployment, yet this is what he is reduced to. What would be thought of a specialist in medicine, who, finding that he could not cure his patient, tried to persuade him that a certain amount of disease was an essential part of health? (Life and Money p218).*

Beveridge was Director of the London School of Economics (1919-1937), and was responsible for the preparation of the 1942 government report which established the Welfare State. It is worth remembering that the London School of Economics was set up to teach the rising class of trade union leaders and Labour politicians the essentials of orthodox economics, so that they could take their place alongside the heads of centralised corporations in guiding the political economy of the country.

O'Duffy does not, however, merely voice empty criticisms of economic orthodoxy: he presents the social credit alternative analysis, while at the same time refuting spurious attacks on Douglas social credit. In a section entitled "Mr. Keynes and the Currency Cranks" O'Duffy states:

In volume ii of the Treatise on Money, Mr. Keynes devotes a section to those whom he calls 'the Army of Heretics and Cranks' – namely, the various schools of monetary reformers. These would appear to be very numerous, but he does not mention any of them by name, not even Major Douglas, the most eminent, whose scheme is supported by a large and growing following, has been expounded in a hundred books, and is the constant theme of a high-class weekly review. Whether Mr. Keynes's criticisms are valid against other monetary reformers I cannot tell; but I propose to show that they are invalid against the Douglas scheme.

After paying a tribute to the disinterestedness, honesty and vigour of the cranks (page 216), Mr. Keynes says:

*Their theories of Money and Credit are alike in supposing that in some way the banks can furnish the real resources which manufacturers and trade can reasonably require without real cost to anyone, and, if they qualify their claims, it is according to some criterion as to the purpose to which borrowers apply the resources they borrow'*

This is misrepresentation. Credit reformers do not expect the banks to furnish real resources – which can only mean labour and material. The demand is that they shall furnish the credit necessary to utilise these resources according to scientific, instead of rule-of-thumb, methods.

Mr. Keynes proceeds:

*For they argue thus. Money (meaning loans) is the life-blood of industry. If money (in this sense) is available in sufficient quantity and on easy terms, we shall have no difficulty in employing to the full the entire available supply of the factors of production. ... If, therefore, sufficient bank credit was freely available, there need never be unemployment.*

Mr. Keynes's Sisyphistic habit of mind completely misinterprets the reformer's case. We do not say that credit reform will abolish unemployment. We say that it will abolish poverty by distributing the existing or potential plenty which industry can produce. Unemployment, in our eyes, is not an evil, but a blessing in disguise. We call it leisure. (*Life and Money*, pages 218-220).

[According to Greek legend the labour of Sisyphus was to roll a huge stone to the top of a hill. As soon as it reached the top it rolled down again. His labour was, therefore, everlasting].

What is needed, O'Duffy concludes, is not more production, that is, more (full) employment, but recognition that technology can now produce a sufficiency of the necessities of life such that all can have a basic entitlement to a secure income and the leisure to enjoy it. Instead, economists are wedded to some mysterious notion of 'equilibrium' which does not allow for changes in technology or any other altered circumstances affecting the real life world. Following further lengthy quotes from Keynes's *Treatise on Money*, O'Duffy concludes that Keynes's misunderstanding of the social credit position is "hopeless":

We are not aiming at 'stability' but at the abolition of artificial poverty. We do not ask that credit should be determined by the quantity of the factors of production available to be employed, but by the quantity of goods needed by the community and capable of being produced by the proper utilisation of the community's real resources. Finally, we do not complain that the banks are not influenced in their lending policy by the object of maintaining an optimum level of employment. We complain that they are not influenced by the object of securing a maximum consumption of goods.

"This ideal of stability' is the key to Mr. Keynes's mentality. He looks upon the economic system as a thing existing per se; discusses most learnedly its parts and functions; and is deeply concerned that it shall work efficiently. But he seems almost unaware of its real purpose, and fails to observe, or, at any rate, to allow for, external conditions which must radically affect its actions. Thus in the whole of his comprehensive treatise he never mentions the fact that this is an age of plenty, and he thinks in terms of scarcity as tacitly as did Adam Smith two hundred years ago. The *Treatise on Money* is rather like a treatise on bicycles which might be written by a brilliant mechanic who knows all about the construction and working of a bicycle, but has forgotten that its primary purpose is to carry a man, and is imperfectly aware of the improvement of the roads since the eighteenth century. (O'Duffy *Life and Money*, pages 222-3).

The passages are quoted at length to indicate the extent of interaction between orthodox and 'heretical' economists of the time. In his *General Theory* Keynes again makes reference to the 'army of heretics', this time naming Douglas, alongside Silvio Gesell and Karl Marx, causing general consternation among academic Marxists.

It is also worth noting that O'Duffy's use of the word 'scheme' in connection with the Douglas analysis is somewhat misleading. Apart from the *Draft Mining Scheme*, which was developed as a basis for discussion of the economics of guild socialism rather than specific blueprint, Douglas repeatedly distanced himself from making definite proposals for reform. Instead he stressed the importance of the people deciding what they wanted first – and then setting about finding the experts to achieve the desired ends. In this way economic democracy could replace an outdated economic system arbitrarily dominated by finance.

Chapters VIII and IX take a tour through a maze of inconsistencies in a world wedded to the values of the money economy. Mr Robinson summarises the materialistic philosophy in Chapter X. Learned economists and theologians are in agreement that distribution of food and clothing to

the poor and needy would cause untold havoc in the finely balanced economic system. Hence the poor should be eliminated. O'Duffy here anticipates the work of Susan George, author of *How the Other Half Dies*, most particularly *The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century* (Pluto Press 1999). Mac is warned to stay clear of "currency cranks and unorthodox economists", against whose views "the Bank" has wisely closed the press (p85).

Meanwhile, the fast-evolving marketing and advertising industries were creating markets for the branded goods of emulative consumerism. When he can afford to buy food, Mac eats processed and packaged foods produced solely for their commercial value (p81). He unquestioningly accepts the values presented to him by the mass media, denigrating the 'intellectual' without thoughtful reason, while considering himself beyond reproach in his acceptance of the *status quo*. As Cuandine comments (p84) the man-in-the-street is "not a very inspiring person to fight for".

In these chapters, too, some reference is made to the flawed logic of production for international trade.

#### Book 1, Chapters XII - XVII

In these chapters, O'Duffy takes up the social credit theme of the financial pressures to **produce** useless, wasteful and disposable **goods**, sold through advertising, as the means to maintain economic activity and keep people in employment (See *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, p62+). A mythical financial accounting system creates a false inducement to produce, counting as 'wealth' what is more accurately accounted as waste:

You seize any unconsidered trifle of matter which may be lying about and you make it into something else. You assert by a process of arithmetic legerdemain known as cost accounting that the value of the original matter which we may call 'a' is now  $a+(b+c)+(d+e)$ , 'b' being labour, 'c' being overhead charges, 'd' being selling charges and 'e' being profit, and that the wealth of the country is increased by this operation in respect of a sum equal to  $(b+c+d+e)$ . With the aid of your banking system you now create credits ... to show that the financial wealth of the country has increased. (Douglas quoted in *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, p49).

Thus, arbitrarily, an increase in *financial* value is accounted positively, regardless of the real value to workers, consumers or society as a whole, and regardless of the destruction of energy and other natural resources. The degradation of the earth's resources and human labour through the production of wasteful and polluting consumer items for exchange on national and international markets on grounds of purely financial profitability is the theme running through *Asses in Clover*. It is no less farcical today to hear politicians and economists defending economic growth regardless of environmental degradation and poverty in a world capable of producing plenty for all. These chapters in *Asses* presage the rapid early 21<sup>st</sup> century pollution of China, India, other 'third world' countries and Eastern Europe, as clothing, plastic toys, white goods, computers and cash farming crops are churned out in the name of free trade and world economic growth.

Meanwhile, in the 'developed' world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the care of the land, the care of children and the pursuit of higher learning are neglected, as people allow themselves to be cooped up in offices undertaking meaningless, soul-destroying tasks in the name of earning an income. On this theme, also, many books, articles and comments have been published, including Juliet Schor's *The Overworked American* and David Bolchover's *The Living Dead: Switched Off, Zoned Out. The Shocking Truth About Office Life*.

Chapter XII introduces the key problem with the economics of the free market, where factors of production are rewarded for their contribution to the *financial* economy. When technological advances have reduced the necessity for the factor of production ‘labour’, many workers in farms, factories and the building trades are made redundant, *i.e.* cease to have a money income as of right. It then becomes necessary to create new types of inessential work so that incomes can be distributed. The production of fashion accessories is just one of the many forms of non-essential production devised to keep incomes flowing through the economy so that goods can be bought and profitable investment rewarded. It then becomes necessary to employ advertising methods to persuade people that they cannot live without the latest fashion.

If the home market is saturated, the next step is to create export markets. However, when all countries are trying to maximize exports and minimise imports, all manner of weird and wonderful barriers to trade must be erected. Chapter XIII demonstrates a variety of ridiculously wasteful ways to consume the surplus production within the bounds of economic orthodoxy.

O’Duffy’s desperate humour has proved to be highly predictive. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the number of people with the independent means necessary to determine their daily lives without being beholden to an employing body for finance, has rapidly declined. People with independent means can work together in a spirit of service, whereas people who have no means must work in institutions which they join primarily for *financial* reasons. Working for money is the *primary* reason for entering into an employment contract. Hence forms of employment - working *for money* - colour the whole of modern society. Farmers, builders, architects, retailers, wholesalers, producers of food, clothes, fuel, furnishings and transport, politicians, academics, military, teachers, health service workers, bankers, media workers are only recognised to be in those roles *because* they are being rewarded financially. If they are sacked, made redundant or retire they cease to be part of the institution. Hence servitude – getting a job – is regarded as a privilege, while losing one’s *paid* job (or failing to find one) is a matter of hardship and degradation.

In Chapter XIII the creation of employment for the sake of keeping people in ‘work’ is pursued to its logical ends. The concepts explored here are by no means dated. In 1971 reliable estimates by the food industry established that, allowing for a varied menu, total UK expenditure on food need only have been £1,800m. Actual expenditure amounted to £6363m. King and Bullmore, the authors of the report, stated emphatically that the population of the UK could have been just as well nourished, and probably more healthy, having spent four and a half thousand million pounds *less* than it actually did (See King and Bullmore, *Tomorrow’s Food*, J. Walker Thompson, 1971). The processing, preservation, packaging, advertising, transportation and bureaucracy added financial value to the food, while providing a range of unnecessary occupations. Ongoing research into processing, GM crops and new biotechnologies, with its attendant experimentation, bears striking similarities to the activities described here. Meanwhile, sustainable farming practices capable of providing local markets with fresh food have, through the passing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, become commercially/financially unviable. The chapter summarises the absurdities of international trade based upon the theory of comparative *financial* cost advantage.

The misuse of the common cultural inheritance is further explored in the following chapter (XIV). In seeking to understand the different aspects of the social order, the obvious place to turn for answers would seem to be the universities. In a progressive civilisation one would expect the centres of learning to be engaged in serious analysis of the political economy. However, although Professor Jawbone may have been a slight exaggeration in the 1930s, by the 21<sup>st</sup> century the serious thinkers in the universities operate as isolates in a foggy sea of detailed research into irrelevant minutiae. As in all other spheres of learning, research is determined by the availability of funding.

O'Duffy accurately portrays the emergence of 'spectator politics'. As the people grumble from the sidelines, waving banners of protest, sending letters to press, contacting their politicians, the academics declaim that Disney culture and junk food are 'what the people want', and who is to deny it to them? Protestors have 'their say' on television, while the corporate world wheels out its 'experts' to explain why protest is misguided. Some dissenting voices are tolerated from time to time, to create the illusion of a reasoned debate. However, the salaries and positions of the 'experts' depend upon them defending the *status quo*. "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding" (Upton Sinclair, quoted in the trailer to Al Gore's film *Inconvenient Truth*, about climate change).

Chapter XVII is concerned with the relatively new phenomenon of commercial salesmanship, brand images and advertising which started in the USA in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 'conspicuous consumption' of cars, household goods and leisure pursuits, and the everyday purchase of luxury items of food and clothing, first depicted by the American economist Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), became fashionable in the UK in the 1920s. The creation of personal status through emulative consumption is a social phenomenon which is meaningless in terms of its usefulness to the community at large. In traditional societies the chief, lord or king was dressed in honourable status symbols as a figurehead uniting the community as a whole. Emulative consumption merely serves to flatter the personal ego, while stimulating the production of waste *without* any attendant responsibilities.

#### Book I, Chapters XVIII and XIX

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the transformation of the arts into escapist forms of 'entertainment' for the workers. The test was whether it would sell in large quantities, following the rules of 'sound' economics. If it was in demand, it must be supplied regardless of normative judgements about its artistic content or spiritual significance. In Chapter XVIII O'Duffy prophetically contrasts the trends in 'serious' and popular literature, the latter being churned out for no other reason but to make money, attributing the changes to 'economies in education'.

The 1930s is the decade of the early American cultural colonisation, commencing with the rise of Disney. His first full length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) provides a classic example of giving the masses what they want to consume in their leisure hours, while setting the pattern for Disney heroines. Snow White is pretty, young, sweet-tempered, innocent and obedient. She is content with the routine tasks of housekeeping because she knows that her handsome, capitalist prince will come to her rescue. In face of danger she totters away on high-heeled shoes in floods of tears. Finding a tumble-down cottage in the woods, the home of male workers (the dwarfs) who obviously have nobody to mother them, she feels impelled to clean up for them. The 'baddie' in the film is the power-seeking step-mother, who gives the beautiful young girl a poisonous apple, sending her into a deep sleep. The dwarfs guard her until her prince wakes her from the state of suspended animation that is the fate of all women without a man. Snow White rides off with the stranger, with never a thought for her worker companions. The crone, representing older women who seek power, is destroyed.

Writing in the decade when the first Disney film appeared, O'Duffy perceives the degradation of male/female relations into short-term self-gratification, as young women become mere sex objects dressing themselves for sale to the highest bidder. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, 'liberation' meant being sexually available at all times, while being available also for 'economic activity' (work) to buy the clothes, house and consumer items giving the illusion of being the princess/heroine, with holidays in theme parks and leisure resorts to maintain the dream.

A recurring theme throughout *Asses* is the effect of economic ‘progress’ on the home, family life, education and culture generally. The ambiguity of the roles of women – and men - as observed by O’Duffy, has become increasingly pronounced. Women seek to maintain a youthful appearance through slimming diets, while shouldering the bulk of the responsibility not only for home, child care and the care of the chronically sick but increasingly acting as the main or sole ‘breadwinner’. Meanwhile male roles are increasingly confused. Boys who learn to play games on computers and football pitches, grow up to find they can be accepted or rejected as workers or fathers for reasons seemingly beyond their control. In places throughout *Asses*, O’Duffy introduces female characters on the model of the crone or wise (old) woman drawn from classic or folk mythology, including Badb the War Goddess (p164ff) who corrects the hero when appropriate (page 198).

O’Duffy’s crude critique of 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism (pages 154-5) may appear dated, and be unacceptable to feminists. Nevertheless, the poet Wendell Berry has challenged the notion that it is intrinsically ‘liberating’ for a woman (or man) to take paid employment that puts them under the authority of a boss (man or woman) whose authority specifically requires and expects obedience.

*Corporate power is composed only of lower underlings and higher underlings. This is invariably revealed when the time comes for accepting responsibility for something unpleasant, such as the Exxon fiasco in Prince William Sound, for which certain lower underlings are blamed but no higher underling is responsible. The underlings at the top, like telephone operators, have authority and power, but no responsibility.* (Wendell Berry *What are People For?* 1990, page 183).

Berry’s essay, entitled *Feminism, the Body and the Machine*, echoes O’Duffy’s much earlier questioning of the notion that all sense of personal responsibility for one’s actions was ‘old fashioned’, necessarily to be rejected in the name of ‘progress’. Berry continues:

*And the oppressiveness of some of this office work defies belief. Edward Mendelson (in the New Republic, February 22, 1988) speaks of “the office worker whose computer keystrokes are monitored by the central computer in the personnel office, and who will be fired if the key-strokes-per-minute figure doesn’t match the quota.” And what are we to say of the diversely skilled country housewife who now bores the same six holes day after day on an assembly line? What higher form of womanhood is she evolving toward?*

*“How, I am asking, can women improve themselves by submitting to the same specialization, degradation, trivialization, and tyrannization of work that men have submitted to? And that question is made legitimate by another: how have men improved themselves by submitting to it? The answer is that men have not, and women cannot, improve themselves by submitting to it* (Berry *op. cit.* p184).

The problem, concludes Berry, echoing O’Duffy, is that women and men alike are submitting to an economy that exploits and degrades people and everything around them. Feminists and supporters of the *status quo* generally cannot cope with the idea that people might wish to work for motives other than financial. They assume that the only help worth giving to others must not be given, but sold. *Love, friendship, neighborliness, compassion, duty – what are they? We are realists. We will be most happy to receive your check* (Berry, p185).

Chapter XIX ends with a very plausible account of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* adapted for the modern film industry. The practice of employing researchers at vast expense to create the illusion of authenticity for an unthinking public continues to this day.

#### Book I, Chapters XX – XV

C.H. Douglas' economic writings arose, by his own account, through his observation of the readiness whereby finance was made available for the stupidity of modern warfare, when it was not previously available for essential peace-time engineering projects. The spectacle of 9 million men setting about killing each other in World War I for no sane or explicable reason, still pre-occupied the memories of all thinking adults in the 1930s, as did the fear that it could all happen again. As noted in *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, p72, Douglas observed consistently that international economic competition results in political instability leading inevitably to war. Such war is, "not only a crime but a blunder." If, however, international trade ceases to be based on financial competition, each country can more efficiently focus on meeting its own subsistence needs so that trade can be conducted in a spirit of co-operation.

The description of the way modern warfare is engineered by the politicians, financial institutions and the media in Chapter XX is classic, and needs no amplification. The self-same tactics led to the 21<sup>st</sup> century attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and were condoned for the self-same reasons. In the rest of Book I O'Duffy explores the impact of secular freedom and materialism upon marriage and family life, contrasting it both with love-based partnership on the one hand and the over-moralising of religious authorities on the other. The theme pre-occupied O'Duffy, and appears throughout his writings.

#### Book II, Chapters I - IX

Book II returns to the main story line. The economic justification for the original capture of the song birds and wild flowers, representing the non-monetised natural world, is explained. Equally, the methodology used by King Goshawk's economic advisor, the creation of money 'credits' out of nothing, is noted. What is meant by the "issue of credits" would have been well understood at the time of original publication of *Asses*. On this point, in *Life and Money* O'Duffy refers the reader to Douglas' *The Monopoly of Credit* for a "scientific" explanation of how the money system works. When first published in 1931, *The Monopoly of Credit* carried the following statement on its dust jacket;

*How is it possible for a world which is suffering from overproduction to be in economic distress? Where does money come from? Why should we economise when we are making too many goods? How can an unemployment problem, together with a manufacturing and agricultural organisation which cannot obtain orders, exist side by side with a poverty problem? Must we balance our budget? Why should we be asked to have confidence in our money system, if it works properly?*

The book offers answers to these and other questions. In the Chapter entitled "Where does money come from?" Douglas draws attention to the ephemeral nature of money/finance/'credit'. Suppose Great Britain was regarded as a commercial undertaking. It might produce a balance sheet. Normally, in any undertaking, its potentialities are its assets, while the calls upon those potentialities are its liabilities. Hence one could envisage:

**GREAT BRITAIN Ltd**

<b>Assets</b>	<b>Liabilities</b>
(Population, Education, Morale)- Human Potential	National Debt
Policy	Bankers (Potential creators of effective demand)
Organisation	Insurance Companies
Natural Resources	(Mortgage and Bond Holders)
Developed Power	Cash at call
Plant (Railways, Buildings, Tools, etc.)	Taxation for Public Services
Goodwill (Tradition, Reputation, etc.)	
Work in Progress	
Consumable Goods	

The assets arise from the individual and collective creative efforts made by the population. The liabilities impose limits upon the capacity of the population to determine productive and distributive outcomes – what should be made and who has a right to incomes to buy the commodities (goods and services produced). Note that the above chart is unlike familiar accounting systems. The liabilities are not defined. The fixed assets appear on the opposite side to the money assets. The two sides do not balance, and cannot be made to balance, because the financial system is, at present, in opposition to all other interests. It has a life of its own.

As O’Duffy, following Douglas, indicates, the relationship between the financial system and the real economy is not beyond comprehension. All that is necessary is for people to start to think coherently on the subject. Hence the necessity (in Chapter 1) to re-capture the escaped bird. Candor is aware that “the whole financial system would be upset if people could have anything for nothing” (p164-5 *Asses*. See also *The PE* p34-43, and *The Monopoly of Credit* p19-20). That is, people must continue to labour under the delusion that working *for money* is central to human existence.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, across the world, the basic necessities of life, including food, fuel and even water are increasingly subject to a financial charge. Meanwhile, the corporate media, advertising firms and even the churches accept the financial *status quo* as a given – “both morally and socially”.

The delightful description of the flight of the blackbird to Ireland in Chapter II requires little comment, save perhaps to note the desperate desire of virtually all wage/salary slaves in America to desert their paid jobs in order to ‘get rich quick’ by claiming the reward.

Chapter III, on the spirit of internationalism and peace, forms another little gem on a subject which has by no means become dated with the passing of the decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Once again, the hidden agenda of (international) finance’s control over press and media is beautifully portrayed. The bandying about of spurious arguments on fundamental issues has become so commonplace that the advice offered through the media to the people of Ireland in the final paragraph is entirely credible.

In *King Goshawk and the Birds*, the first book of the Cuanduine trilogy, the Dublin Philosopher initiates the quest to free the song birds and wild flowers from the grip of King Goshawk. In Chapter IV, the story line returns to Ireland. The Philosopher countered the media advice to the Irish with four sound arguments which contain a great deal of food for thought. The first raises

the question of the money creation process itself. The second highlights the ultimate source of all wealth. The third raises the issue of value, while the fourth repeats a major theme of the book, that the world is suffering from over-work and over-production.

The rest of the chapter is so true to life: having adopted a position on an issue, few are prepared to change their stance, even when it would be in their best interests to do so. The secret re-capture of the bird highlights the fact that in virtually all wars the initial spark has little or nothing to do with the underlying causes of war.

Chapter V provides a delightfully chauvinistic explanation of the plight of the Irish. Once again, in a few simple strokes, O'Duffy contrasts the sophisticated morality of nominally Christian nations with the true faith which he sees, arguably, as present in his native land. The spirit of faith, learning and hospitality contrasts with the materialism of the centralised, bureaucratic state. The core theme of the book, developed in Book I, Chapter II, is encapsulated here. The Christian Church and other faith-based institutions are now rooted in the world of secular materialism, respecting wealthy individuals and accepting funds from dubious sources such as the National Lottery. Learning and hospitality depend upon adequate funding from an economic system based purely upon self-interest and material gain. Chapter VI also contrasts the traditional values of legend, *e.g.* of heroism in war, with the ugliness of modern warfare. The *geasa* laid upon Cuanduine by Badb are a traditional form of Irish tabu, whereby the hero is warned of things not to be done for fear of disastrous consequences, with the secondary sense of an obligation to do something commanded by another. In true story-teller style, the three *geasa* (singular *geis*) are unintelligible to hero and reader alike until events unfold.

Over the decades since O'Duffy was writing, the materialistic influences of bureaucracy and self-interest have overwhelmed the spiritual ideas, ideals and imaginations encapsulated in the world of myth and legend. In Chapters VII, VIII and IX O'Duffy contrasts that world with the absurdity of a civilisation based on self-interest mediated by bureaucracy. Throughout history people have allowed themselves to be ruled by kings and dictators, philosophers have mused, legends have been told and works of art and literature have recorded the story of humanity. O'Duffy juxtaposes sacred notions of justice, beauty and right-thinking with the values of the 'civilised' world as expressed in academia and the mass media. The ordinary person in the street no longer has the heroes and heroines of legend as role models. Instead, they are "the willing slaves fettered hard with chains of gold".

At about the same period as O'Duffy was writing, CH Douglas observed that the employees in the armaments industry benefited just as much from the high wages as did the employers from the profits. He commented, "I cannot see any difference between the culpability of the employee and that of the employer." Both Douglas and O'Duffy held that people who accept employment in the military/industrial complex are motivated by self-interest just as much as the profiteers. Douglas' use of the word 'culpability' in a radio broadcast (*The Causes of War*, November 1934, reprinted in *The Listener*, 5 December 1934) is noteworthy. Douglas' speech was one of a series of broadcasts by eminent people concerned at the looming possibility of a second world war. None of the others offered a coherent account of the causes of war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. None of the others took it as read that modern warfare is an evil which can be avoided by the exercise of intellect and right judgement. As he further explained in his radio speech, Douglas took issue with all forms of employment, identifying economic expansionism (growth) as a form of warfare leading inevitably to military warfare, and the mercenary army of workers as the ground troops. For Douglas and O'Duffy the problem lies less with the corporate heads than with the ordinary people who endorse their authority.

## Book II, Chapter X

O'Duffy returns to the culpability of the man/woman-in-the-street in accepting without question the necessity to give service to, and accept rewards from, the military/industrial complex. These are the “asses in clover”. People are prepared put science, and knowledge in general, to corrupt and immoral purposes because they are paid to do so. Through financial rewards, society condones research into, and production of, a host of destructive and ecologically degrading products because they are *financially* profitable. (See Steven Schofield: *Peace and Prosperity: Transition from Permanent Military Economy to Advanced Civil Economy* ISBN: 0 9541814 0 9 £8.99 176pp, obtainable from Peace and Prosperity, PO Box 6, Bradford BD3 0XB. The simple adage holds sway – “If a job is worth doing, it is worth being paid to do it”.

The attack on the Irish is condoned by nations across the world because “the Irish had put themselves outside the pale of civilisation by their disobedience to the laws of sound finance” (page 203). With a few bold strokes O'Duffy depicts 20<sup>th</sup> century political economy. The refusal of the Irish to give up the bird (which had already been returned to captivity) was an offence against ‘sound’ economics because to expect something for nothing was a grave sin. If economic measures fail, war is justifiable.

The weapons described by O'Duffy are no figment of his imagination. The descriptions are accurate, taken from the scientific documentation of the ‘advances’ in technology at the time. Journalists and historians have decried 20<sup>th</sup> century weaponry. In the introduction to his book *The Pity of War* (1998, re World War I), Niall Ferguson quotes lines from Wilfred Owen’s *Dulce et Decorum Est* on the horror of gas warfare. O'Duffy’s indictment of the warfare of ‘civilised’ nations is documented by Martin Gilbert in his three volume *History of the Twentieth Century*, the second volume of which is aptly subtitled *Descent into Barbarism 1933-51*.

## Book II, Chapters XI – XVIII

In these chapters the story progresses rapidly through its horrendously prophetic course. The passages on pages 210-11, for instance, predicted Hiroshima/Nagasaki, Dresden, Vietnam, East Timor and the many other attacks on civilian populations which can be justified only on the grounds detailed by O'Duffy on pages 203-4. Chapter XII is equally prophetic on the corruption of the news media under the ultimate control of finance. Thus right thinking, which must precede right action, was, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, avoided. It was simply in nobody’s interests – in business, academia or politics – to challenge the sources of their power, prestige, and income. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century lone voices like Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, Michael Moore and many others remain just that – lone voices amid a sea of ‘yes-men’ saving to enjoy their personal benefits in retirement.

Book II ends in true story-teller style. Apparent victory is undone by the hero’s innocence. The power behind the throne is allowed to live, so that the masses can continue to be swayed by weasel arguments which allow them to remain enslaved to finance in a thought-free existence. The Philosopher dies under the mistaken impression that his task is completed.

## Book III, Chapter 1-III

As far as the story line is concerned, Book II is the most satisfactory section of *Asses in Clover*. However, Book III demonstrates the logical conclusion to the story of humanity if the human intellect fails to move beyond the hedonistic lifestyle. Though depressing in its conclusion, Book

III contains a delightful send-up of the materialistic philosophy which dominated 20<sup>th</sup> century thought.

Chapter I is a classic portrayal of 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘standpoint’ opinionating on vital issues by key players in opinion formation – governments, political parties, international bodies. Perhaps the role of the League of Nations is now taken by The World Trade Organisation (WTO), North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and so on, while the roles of the Christian Church and the press remain much the same. The collusion of socialism with capitalism, noted long ago by Douglas (See *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, pages 18 and 100) is illustrated in the parallel notions that “millionaires are good for employment”, whilst birds should be trained to provide leisure enjoyment for the proletariat. The excising of all things spiritual from the social order is depressingly accurate.

Chapter II touches upon the major theme of the book, the centrality of ‘sound finance’ to corporate capitalism. O’Duffy’s virulent animosity towards bankers is not particularly helpful. As Douglas never tired of saying, bankers are the experts on banking: they merely do the work demanded of them by society. If those working for change in the social order do not take the trouble to understand how the existing system of banking and finance developed, and continues to operate, small wonder if they fail in their endeavours to create a just and sustainable political economy. Nevertheless, O’Duffy presents a reasonably accurate account of the ephemeral nature of the money/credit/banking system. In so doing he highlights an undeniable fact: few indeed in the world of business, politics, press or academia have the foggiest notion of how the financial system operates.

Banking is nothing mysterious. Banking evolved historically to meet the new demands of the industrial revolution, with its new technologies and new employment practices (See *The Politics of Money*, pages 64-9, and *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, pages 36-40). O’Duffy is, however, accurate in his portrayal of the powerful desire of leading players in politics, business and the media to appease a financial ‘god’ which they do not understand. There is a general but vague perception that banks do no more than act as brokers between savers/investors and borrowers. What exactly bankers deal in as they create and reclaim debt, remains a mystery. Unwilling to research the matter and trust to their own judgement, many simply take what the system has to offer. Chapter III foretells the evolution of theme parks, eco-tourism and the entire leisure industry as forms of employment and consumption. For capitalist and socialist alike, *employment* remains as the necessary pre-requisite for receipt of an income, no matter how socially unnecessary or ecologically harmful the end result might be.

#### Book III, Chapter IV

The quest imposed upon the hero, the demi-god Cuanduine, to free the song birds and wild flowers from the grip of corporate ownership can be viewed on one level as a mission to bring social justice and ecological sustainability into the world. The people, however, remain convinced that the insane economic system into which they have been born and educated, is non-negotiable. Here Slawmy Cander speaks not only for bankers but also for leading intellectuals in all walks of life. Their reasoning goes something like this:

“In theory and idealistically the birds should be freed. We are well aware that the very future of humanity is threatened by ecological disaster and the consequences of introducing unsustainable technologies based upon greed, not need. It would be very nice if we could reduce our ecological footprint on the planet, check global warming and create a healthy environment for our children to live in. It might give us more time to appreciate the finer things in life – art, beauty, music,

nature, life itself. But we have got to be practical. In real life we have to meet our economic obligations. There are debts, mortgages and bills to pay, and there's nothing we can do about that except follow a career and make our way up the ladder of success. In any case, I like my work. It is what I want to do. I'm a top professional in my field. Many are not as fortunate as I am. They have to work hard at a tedious job for a pittance. But what you've got to realise is that they have a right to that pittance if they have worked for it. No matter what the true value of, or necessity for, that work, society has a duty to provide them with – work. What's more, with the housing market as it is, we must make sure that our children can command good earning power. In due course we may be able to consider freeing the birds (ecological sustainability) but not right now. I have my life to get on with, thank you very much. And anyway, some of us need to be rich so that we can give to the poor. That's far more important than asking esoteric questions about the causes of poverty, meaning of life and all that rubbish.”

The second *\*geis*, (see Book II chapter VI), is “not to answer the questions of White upon the lips of Black”, *i.e.*, to be aware that seemingly sensible questions can be deliberately presented in such a way as to trap the unwary hero. The intention in asking such a question is to cash in on the general ignorance which results from failure to think things through to logical/coherent conclusions. The motives for asking such questions are generally defensive – what you are saying challenges my world view, and is dangerous to my position of prestige or power. Corporate business-as-usual depends upon the populace remaining in a steady-state of inertia founded on ignorance. Hence, this section of the book highlights the necessity to focus upon the educational system which is currently denying children and young people their basic human right *not* to become wage (or salary) slaves in a rapidly disintegrating social order. If this task was seriously embarked upon it would work wonders for the present generation of workers, who would find themselves examining their accepted values and mind-sets about their lifestyles.

### Book III, Chapters V-XVII,

Alarmed at the demi-god Cuandaine's quest to liberate the song birds and wild flowers (the natural world) from the grip of finance, orthodox economists are called in to explain that, according to sound economics, it is unreasonable to demand something for nothing. People must work for money in order to buy the things they want. If they liberate the birds, there will be no employment in the aviaries. Without wages, people will have no money to buy the necessities of life, and the economy will collapse.

Professor Banger is an economist, as are the others described so aptly in the paragraph over pages 244-5. This raises the question, what is an economist? O'Duffy defines an economist as one who recognises “the supremacy of Finance over humanity”. At the time O'Duffy was writing ordinary people were questioning the hegemony of economic orthodoxy, and trying to evaluate the teachings of CH Douglas in the context of orthodoxy.

In the same year as the publication of *Asses in Clover*, the socialist economist GDH Cole launched an attack on Douglas in the form of an edited book entitled *What Everybody Wants to Know About Money* (Victor Gollancz 1933).<sup>1</sup> Designed for a popular audience, Cole's book sought to re-establish confidence in the business-as-usual political economy under threat from Douglas's social credit, very much in the same way as Slawmy Cander enlists the economists in the chapters under discussion when the corporate business-as-usual *status quo* comes under threat from Cuandaine. In a chapter entitled “Four Monetary Heretics”, Hugh Gaitskell lumps together Douglas with three other lesser writers whose focus can more justly be described as being limited to monetary reform alone. However, the text makes clear that it is Douglas that is the focus of attention, as Gaitskell spells out the extent of Douglas' achievement. After fifteen years, Douglas

has in his support two weekly papers, *The New Age* and *The New English Weekly*, a substantial body of clerical opinion, and organised branches throughout the country. Gaitskell starts his chapter with the statement: “This is not a heresy hunt.” He continues by explaining that economics is “an inexact, non-experimental science” which allows “many disagreements and requires greater discussion.”

*“Indeed it may well be claimed that the word heretic is not legitimate here at all. For without orthodoxy there can be no heresy; but where in economics are the orthodox to be found? There is force in this argument. Yet it is not so strong that we must abandon the title of the chapter. Economists disagree about some things. But they agree about many others. A heretic, as we interpret the word, is one who holds different views even about these latter. Two further qualities have been required [to identify an economic heretic] – public recognition and an amateur status. All those whose names follow are comparatively well-known. **None of them has ever held an academic appointment in economics.**”* (GDH Cole (ed.) *What Everybody Wants to Know About Money*, p346, emphasis added)

What is happening here is exactly the same as the fictional scenario in the chapters under discussion. Feeling threatened by the demands for the exercise of logical thought, the mainstream launches an attack by claiming the high ground of established authority. The fiercer the attacks, the greater is the perceived threat to the *status quo*.

Economists perpetuate their nonsensical theories because they are paid to do so by the academic establishment. Economists who attempt to follow the lines of thought presented by ‘heretics’ will not be taken onto the payroll of a university. Hence, in order to become an accredited orthodox economist it is necessary to put aside doubts and *assume* that the teachers are correct. By the time economists are in a position to ask questions, they are teachers themselves, and already committed to orthodox theorising. Throw in an algebraic formula and a few statistics, and the ‘person-in-the-street’ (which includes academics in different disciplines in the social sciences) is unutterably lost. It is very difficult to believe that the economic theorising upon which politicians rely for their policy decisions actually has no more relationship to practice than had medieval theological exploration of the numbers of angels able to stand on the point of a pin.

Orthodox economic theory assumes that wealth is necessary before ‘work’ can be created, *i.e.* that wealth is the cause of work. This circuitous line of reasoning does not bear close examination. If work is the cause of wealth, and money is wealth, the only way to make money is by working for it. Wealth will not spring into existence while labour and machines stand idle. Neither will one type of wealth, in the form of a house, become available because we ‘save’ another type of wealth, *i.e.* by not consuming food and clothes.

If, moreover, money is not wealth but merely a token of exchange, orthodox theory becomes totally incredible. It is possible to have the machines, the materials, the skills, the labour and the need for the products, but these forms of real resources cannot be converted into wealth because of the want of exchange tokens. Hence, as Professor Banger explains, a party of people stranded on a fertile island would refuse to collect food, till the soil or build shelters *because they had no money*.

It follows, argue the economists, that capitalists are supplying a public service by providing employment so that food, clothing, shelter and other necessities can be provided for all. In order to keep the economy sound, it may be necessary for people to work longer hours for lower pay so that in the long run all will be better off. Redistributing the wealth to the people, by liberating the

birds (natural resources), would be disastrous. It is all very sad, the economists explain, wiping away their tears, but the economic facts of life have to be faced.

Capitalists are a necessary fact of life, say the economists. While most people consume all that they earn, capitalists set aside their personal inclination to exist from hand to mouth. They save their personal surplus so that they can invest it in creating places of employment. Capitalists pay out wages to workers, who can then buy the goods they need. Taxing businesses merely means that they can pay out less in wages. If employers are forced out of business, fewer people are employed, which means less money is around to buy the goods offered on the market, resulting in economic depression.

The statements made by O'Duffy's economists are taken from actual statements by leading public figures of the day, including Keynes (who is quoted at length in O'Duffy's *Life and Money*) and W.H. Beveridge, author of report leading to introduction of the tax-based social security system. The same convoluted reasoning holds sway today because people want to have faith in the well-paid academics and experts who are, they consider, the right people to do their thinking for them, to save them the trouble.

Faith in the experts has all the trappings of a religion. A few years after *Asses in Clover* was first published, the economic depression of the 1930s came to a close, not for the reasons declaimed by economists, but because finance became available for re-armament leading up to World War II. As W.L. Bardsley explains:

*So far from rearmament being a burden on this and future generations, it is the very activity which has released purchasing power where it is needed – in the pockets of the people. It is a silly, unnecessary way of releasing purchasing power, but that is what rearmament has done. The employees of the booming armaments industry are enabled to call upon the vast resources of modern production for their requirements of food, warmth and shelter, aye, and amusements, and beer and cigarettes – on one condition. That condition is that they work at making guns, battleships, bombing planes and poison gas. A National Dividend would enable them and others to call upon the same vast resources for all they need without having to make guns first. But if we need armaments it is clear that we can make them and enjoy a higher standard of living, not a lower one. There is plenty for all, and time and resources to make armaments into the bargain if need be. (Social Credit, February 5, 1937)*

It was not necessary to give up producing butter in order to produce guns, as the economics textbooks say. On the contrary, the production of guns, along with the general rearmament preparatory to the wholesale destruction of lives and property during World War II, enabled workers to buy all the necessities and luxuries they required. The puzzle as to why this should be so exercised the minds of thinking people right up to the point where the madness of war, followed by the general prosperity of the post war reconstruction years, brought a halt to idealistic visions of the good society. As a result of the rampant materialism of Rational Economic Man in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, economic thought has remained at the level of confusion described by O'Duffy.

For a re-ordering of the economy to come about, it will first be necessary for ordinary people in all walks of life to focus their minds on the key economic assumption of the link between employment and income. What exactly does it mean to be 'economically active'? Is it really logical that in the post-industrial era it is essential to "work harder, consume less and produce more", as Professor Banger says on page 247? In *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, 1991 Juliet Schor observed that the notion put about by orthodox economists

that people were free to work more or less hours according to fluctuations in the price of labour was blatantly false. The effective choice for workers of all types is between taking increasingly longer hours or leaving the 'labour market' completely to face unemployment and total income loss. The solution may be to disengage by wasting as much time as possible during the long working hours, as described in David Bolchover in *The Living Dead: Switched Off, Zoned Out, The Shocking Truth About Office Life* (2005). Or it may be to seek European Union legislation, as advocated by Jean Lambert in *I Must Work Harder, Britain and the Working Time Directive* (2006). Either way, the solution adopted serves to endorse the notion that employment is the sole route to an income.

Unfortunately, people continue to take seriously any economist who declaims that the best way out of a mess is to follow exactly the same methods as led to the problem in the first place. However foolish the advice and explanations given by economists, one or more of the army of 'orthodox' academics can always be found to speak in defence of the *status quo*. Identifying the cause of the problem as the rigidity of intellect born of adherence to convention, O'Duffy's hero turns to Bergson's classic essay *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900). Bergson defined the comic as the result of the sense of relief felt at freedom from the mechanistic and materialistic. Laughter involves setting aside emotions, as it appeals to intelligence pure and simple. However, as Bergson explains, this intelligence "must always remain in touch with other intelligences ... The comic will come into being, it appears, whenever a group concentrate their attention on one of their number, imposing silence on their emotions and calling into play nothing but their intelligence." Bergson's conception of the comic is based on the tension that exists between rigidity and suppleness: rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective". As O'Duffy explains, laughter is the product of the sense of incongruity aroused by the spectacle of the rational creature, man, behaving like an automaton".

As Cuandine explodes the nonsense that is spoken in defence of economic growth based on full employment (page 258) he breaks his third *geis*, and thus fails in the quest he has been set by the Philosopher. The "Headless Men of the Woods" are, of course, Economists, "men wandering around in a dark forest of dead ideas", whose shifts of argument demonstrate that they have no idea what they are talking about.

O'Duffy's creation of this *geis* clearly arises from his own attempts to engage in meaningful dialogue with orthodox economists. It will strike a chord with all who have not been content to accept the answers of economists and have gone so far as to challenge their premises and conclusions. There is a story about the devil and his companion walking along together and seeing a man pick up a piece of the truth. "Doesn't it trouble you," says the companion, "that this man has found a piece of the truth?" "Not at all," replies the devil. "I shall have him believe it is the only truth to be found." Economists are in the forefront of academics who, having found a view of reality which hangs together, believe they have found the one and only truth and need enquire no further.

With the breaking of the third *geis* in Chapter X, Cuandine's quest fails. In view of the subsequent history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, O'Duffy's impatience, expressed through Cuandine, at the slavish complacency of the comfortable masses who can be roused to war and wasteful destruction but not to think, continues to strike a chord to this day. Even the song birds have been institutionalised.

O'Duffy despairs at human beings who are happier to work for an employer, following instructions rather than thinking for themselves. Most people most of the time only question the social conditions into which they are born when they and their families suffer immediate hardship

and oppression. Under traditional pre-industrial society, the oppressing tyrant could be identified as the source of the problem. Meanwhile, the ‘good’ ruler could be looked to as a role model.

A child born into a pre-industrial village or small town learned very different skills from those born into urban industrial ‘civilisation’. In traditional societies the child’s natural sense of curiosity is encouraged. Brought up among adults engaged in the practical realities of everyday life, the child comes to recognise the necessity to work for food, clothing, fuel and shelter, while at the same time acquiring the necessary practical skills for survival. The collection of wild foods in season – nuts, berries, shellfish, eggs, fungi – was not mere childish play but a serious contribution to the household economy. Collecting fuel, minding the livestock, learning to carve, spin, sew, weave and create tools and implements are among the activities a typical child engages in from an early age, developing in the process, a knowledge of materials, skills, processes and observations of the natural world according to ability. Story, verse and song communicate the ethical, philosophical, artistic and spiritual values underlying the social world. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century few societies remain in which the traditional social fabric remains outside the influence of global culture (See *e.g.* Helena Norberg-Hodge on Ladak). Most people are born into a society dominated by the materialistic values of bureaucracy and self-interest, dominated by technologies which seemingly have a life of their own regardless of the needs of living humanity and the natural world.

As O’Duffy was writing, traditional social customs were not entirely eradicated from living memory.<sup>ii</sup> However, waves of Enclosures, Highland Clearances, the privatisation of land and the Agrarian Revolution resulted in the disintegration of traditional ways of life.<sup>iii</sup> The pool of cheap labour created in the urban settlements, to which the dispossessed fled, allowed mines and factories to spring up, producing goods for profitable trade rather than for use by the local community. Now the worker’s main interest was in receiving a money wage, with whole families living and working in the grimmest of conditions for a pittance to hold body and soul together. The conditions of child labour were often appalling. Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century children in their early teens were sent down the mines in the UK, suffering injuries, chronic illness and death. The educational system set up following the 1870 Education Act provided the worker-to-be with a very different set of guidelines from those born into traditional societies. Basically, children learned to follow rules and obey orders, and to acquire skills which would be useful for ‘earning a living’, *i.e.*, acquiring a money wage. For adults to whom grinding urban poverty was a living memory, any type of ‘work’ which produced a tolerable degree of comfort was accepted without question. *Asses in Clover* was well ahead of its time in foreseeing the folly of unbridled materialism, the secularisation of society and the unrestrained dominance of the money value-based political agenda.

Chapter XII refers to the first books in the trilogy, in which the body of Mr Aloysius O’Kennedy is used by the Philosopher to house Cuchulain as he returns to earth. Meanwhile, O’Kennedy visits Rathé, where, in a Swift-style satire, O’Duffy uses the follies and good sense of the alien society to reflect the stupidity and bad sense of Earth economics. To turn his story into a saleable product for the mass market, O’Kennedy must remove the “chapters about religion and science, politics, economics, law, education and so on” which make up the bulk of the story in *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street*, the second book in O’Duffy’s trilogy.

Cuanduine despairs and leaves the planet in Chapter XVII. However, the final chapters contain valuable vignette insights into discussable alternatives to the lunacy of perpetual economic growth based on full-employment policies.

The Final Chapters

O'Duffy imagines an alternative economic system based upon the social credit ideas of C.H. Douglas. Rather than looking back to a pre-industrial society of traditional customs handed down through the generations, O'Duffy depicts a technologically sophisticated society, which has chosen a materially simple lifestyle, free from commercialism, emulative consumption and materialistic values. The resultant blueprint for the Selenite Utopia is rather like traditional views of heaven, where all is sweetness and light, but distinctly uninteresting. In common with many would-be reformers, O'Duffy forgets that the processes of social life must be in a constant state of flux. Hence continuous re-evaluation of the situation is essentially an ongoing procedure. Crucially, it is the task of the people as a whole to work for practical change. That, however, presupposes a certain determination to think through alternatives.

It is, however, easier to accept without challenge that money is somehow created through employment, *i.e.*, that money comes from an employer, than to pursue the less familiar social credit analysis. The common perception is that money comes from employers, and employers, whether state or private, acquire money from banks. Some money comes into the banks from sales of goods and services, while the rest comes from banks in the form of loans for investment. People *want* to work for money. Hence the banks are serving the demands of the people at the moment. It is possible to argue over the detail, but there is no debate over the basic principle that people have to go to work to 'make' the money to put bread on the table and pay their taxes for the benefit of society as a whole.

Hence to challenge the notion that people have no choice but to work for money comes to the same thing as breaking the second *geis* (responding to the questions of white on the lips of black). Black does not have to be the powerful international financier, politician or administrator. Exactly the same motive applies when anyone takes employment *primarily* for financial gain. The inherent satisfactions involved in certain types of work can serve to obscure the issue. Nevertheless, the teacher, doctor, engineer, charity worker or artist who would stop work tomorrow if there was no financial payment attached to the work is in no position to criticise international financiers and corporate heads. Powerful, highly paid players in the world economy are in top positions because society rewards them well for the services they render *to* society. That is what society *wants*.

The problem is that people *like* the house they are buying. They *enjoy* driving the car of their choice. They *want* to buy food, clothing, furnishings and leisure pursuits for themselves and their children. They *look forward* with eager anticipation to the next holiday, more than likely accessed by air travel. And if they cannot afford those things, they would nevertheless like to have them if they could. Many do give generously to charities, disaster relief and environmental causes, arguing that they have earned their money in ways approved of by society, so that they *can* give to good causes. Many come from backgrounds of dire poverty, miners, mill workers and so on, families who never had two pence to rub together. They feel they have worked hard to better themselves, and it is up to others to do the same. There may be problems in the world, but that is *not my* problem. There is no moral difference whatsoever between the self-interest of the person in the street and that of the Bill Gates of this world, when the *primary* motive for embarking on a form of work is financial reward.

It is, however, impractical to imagine that, left to itself, the invisible hand of the free market economy will somehow put right all the ills of the political economy. The outcome is more likely to concur with the ending of *Asses in Clover* unless a sea-change in practice, backed by a sound theoretical analysis, emerges from the hotchpotch of current alternative initiatives.

## O'Duffy and Economics

*He [Lord Keynes] looks upon the economic system as a thing existing per se; discusses most learnedly its parts and functions; and is deeply concerned that it shall work efficiently. But he seems almost unaware of its real purpose, and fails to observe, or, at any rate, to allow for, external conditions which must radically affect its actions. Thus in the whole of his comprehensive treatise he never mentions the fact that this is an age of plenty, and he thinks in terms of scarcity as tacitly as did Adam Smith two hundred years ago. The Treatise on Money is rather like a treatise on bicycles which might be written by a brilliant mechanic who knows all about the construction and working of a bicycle, but has forgotten that its primary purpose is to carry a man, and is imperfectly aware of the improvement of the roads since the eighteenth century.” (O’Duffy *Life and Money*, pages 222-3).*

### *Life and Money*

As the above quotation indicates, O’Duffy was thoroughly acquainted with the work of mainstream economists. His *Life and Money: Being a Critical Examination of the Principles and Practice of Orthodox Economics with A Practical Scheme to End the Muddle it has made of our Civilisation*, ran to several editions between January 1932 and 1935, being reviewed in a major journal of orthodox economics in the latter year. Writing in the 11<sup>th</sup> October issue of the weekly Social Credit paper, C.H. Douglas observed:

*Eimar O’Duffy is dead, but if I am not mistaken, his books will for many years provide a touchstone of reality in the moving events of the world, which, unlike so many valuable and useful things, can be used not merely with subsequent profit to the user, but with great pleasure at the time of their use.*

In *Asses in Clover*, O’Duffy’s robust exposure of the flaws in orthodox economic thought has stood the test of time, remaining as accessible today as when first written, while providing an enjoyable read. However, over the decades since O’Duffy wrote it, the crucial significance of economics in the everyday life of each individual has increased rather than diminished. No matter how mercenary or how unworldly a person might be, the economy remains central to their physical and social existence. In Book 1, Chapter VI O’Duffy shows that for young people setting out in life, worldly ambitions for money, political power, fame and worldly pleasures are achievable goals. On the other hand, economic security based on wholesome sufficiency is not a realistic ambition. In a world where the whole social framework is governed by materialism and self-interest, it becomes necessary to put one’s own personal economic interests first, placing ideas, ideals and other considerations in an ‘also-ran’ position.

### Economics as a belief system

The dominance of the economy may be obvious in relationship to activities normally classed as ‘economic’. These include all forms of production, distribution and exchange undertaken for money. Thus manufacturing, farming, wholesaling, retailing, transport, catering, banking and so on fall clearly into the category of ‘economic activity’. However – and this is O’Duffy’s central theme – all other forms of human activity have become subservient to the money economy. All who would practice arts, crafts, architecture, music, poetry, or study philosophy, science, theology, history, or develop new technologies, or engage in sewing, cooking, woodwork,

gardening, or care for family, or protect natural resources, for absolutely everybody no matter what they wish to do in life, economics is central. The getting and spending of a money income is essential to make available the basic subsistence necessities (food, fuel, shelter, clothing) and the tools, instruments and materials for the practice of the chosen activities. That being the case, the subject of economics cannot rightly be set aside as ‘boring’, ‘unintelligible’ or ‘a waste of (my) time’.

In *Asses in Clover* O’Duffy presents the challenge: change is essential in the economic sphere if an ecologically sane and socially just society is to emerge from the current mess. However, that change will only come about when ordinary people cease to use their skills and resources in support of the corporate world. For this to become a possibility, the envisioning of alternatives to the status quo is an essential prerequisite. For example, in his *Selenite Utopia* O’Duffy introduces the notion of the unconditional payment of a Basic Income (the Nid) for all citizens regardless of ‘work’ contributions. Proposals of this type are invariably met with a barrage of derision. Although people profess to be unable to understand economics, they *know* that to ‘make’ money you have to go to ‘work’. Everybody has to do it. Just as the medieval theologians ‘knew’ that the earth is flat, so do people today believe that everybody must go to work to make money. Without work, the whole system will seize up, and then where will we all be? It is worth considering the matter in more detail.

Despite its disastrous end results, flat-earth economic theory retains its tenacious grip on the mind of the person in the street. People are too busy to stop and look into the telescope for themselves. With varying feelings of unease and dissatisfaction, many continue to battle through a maze of bureaucracy towards retirement, chronic illness and death, never finding time to understand what is happening in the world around them, and what their role in it all might be.

In considering the universality of interaction with the economy, it is apparent that even the economically inactive – those who do not presently obtain an income directly from the economy – must nevertheless have their needs catered for through the money economy. Children, the sick, pensioners, full-time carers, house-parents, members of religious and other communities, all make demands on the formal money economy, and those needs must be budgeted for. Orthodox economists are no better than the person in the street at explaining the necessary link between economic activity and income. Moreover, however hard they might be pressed to do so, they cannot explain the existence of non-economic agents.

With some notable exceptions,<sup>iv</sup> very few 20<sup>th</sup> century economists could explain how the economy actually works. Most economists are familiar with little beyond their own specialist areas of research, all of which fall within the flat-earth paradigm. I have often been asked to give an opinion on a specific issue ‘as an economist’. The problem here is that the questioner invariably retains a blind faith in flat-earth orthodoxy. Hence attempting to ‘tack on’ a solution to a particular problem is like trying to patch an old garment with new cloth. It simply does not work.

Despite the lack of enthusiasm for discussion of economic issues, however, certain proposals for reform can trigger an emotionally charged reaction, indicating the existence of a fundamental belief system which has inadvertently been challenged. For example, proposals for a National Dividend, Basic Income or any such form of universal payment of an income by right of citizenship will often be met with derision. The ridicule of the powers-that-be is thoroughly understandable, as the thinkers among them would see the full implications of such a measure which would challenge their worldly positions. The scorn of the ordinary person is less comprehensible, as it creates a barrier to serious consideration of the new concept. When Galileo

was called to account for his statements about the nature of the universe, he brought with him a telescope so that the elders of the church could see for themselves the truth of what he was saying. They all refused to look through it, fearing that it would challenge their established convictions. A similar fear appears to surround any questioning of the basic assumptions of everyday economic life.

#### The money economy and the real economy

So – what is ‘the economy’ to which the vast army of workers and consumers owe such allegiance that they would put human existence on earth at risk rather than examine it dispassionately as a prelude to change? The economy has been likened to the tip of an iceberg or the icing on a cake. The supporting bulk of the iceberg or cake is composed of all forms of human activity not mediated by money, plus the entirety of the physical and natural world upon which all human life remains utterly dependent. The economy is the formal economy where goods and services are exchanged for money. The economy takes those things that earth has given and human hands have made, gives them a money value according to its own peculiar accounting system, and when it has done with them spews out the resultant waste.

The study of economics originated as an attempt to explain the emerging phenomenon of people working for money, rather than working the land to produce the subsistence necessities for their own use, while paying tithes in kind. Adam Smith noted the advantages of new technologies based upon the ‘division of labour’. Not only were people becoming increasingly specialised in each craft, but the production of even a single item – Smith used the example of pins – was broken down into individual tasks. If different workers used machines to make different parts of the pin all day long, the total increase in pin production was vastly greater than if each worker tried to make the whole pin.

Carried across the whole of manufacturing industry, this principle meant a vast increase in the total output of material products. The problem was then to explain how ‘fair’ shares of the increased ‘wealth’ should be allocated. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith went straight to the heart of the matter. It was all a question of freedom of choice. Rather than imposing some bureaucracy from above, the economy should be viewed as a vast area of individual choices. If each economic actor follows their own self-interest in making their choices, the ‘invisible hand’ of the free market will ensure that the production and allocation of the nation’s wealth will be maximized to the benefit of all. The theory of the ‘invisible hand’ has formed the basis of the study of the economy ever since.

Hence orthodox economics has limited itself to the study of *only* those resources and commodities which are exchanged for money. A farmer may use the land, tools, seeds and know-how to produce a food crop. However, it is only if and when he offers the crop for sale that the existence of the crop registers in the formal economy. ‘Food manufacturers’ may add further *economic (money)* value to the crop by processing potatoes - for example - into crisps, packaging them for sale in a supermarket. At each stage of manufacture money is exchanged, right up to the point of final purchase or ‘consumption’. The simple example can be repeated millions of times, as different types of food, clothing, furnishings, cars, machines and armaments are churned out by the formal economy. As the commodity progresses from natural product to consumer, increased money value is added, although environmental degradation increases along the way. Production for sale invariably involves the use of fuel, transport, packaging and the accompanying production of waste. All along the line of processing, people’s lives are devoted to forms of paid employment which, like the workers in O’Duffy’s aviaries, they tolerate for the sake of a money income.

## Mushroom Man

Orthodox theory has served the society of secular materialism very well indeed. Certainly total production and consumption of goods and services increased many-fold. However, the orthodox model fails to take account of where its central actor, 'Rational Economic Man' (REM), came from in the first place. The worker/consumer simply appears from nowhere, like a mushroom, ready to work and to spend his money as he chooses, with no duties or responsibilities to the human community or to the earth which sustains all life. When REM becomes sick or in need of care, the economy is no longer interested in providing for him/her. Furthermore, the 'invisible hand' model assumes that all are equally endowed with wealth, when in reality some inherit vast sums, while others have nothing to sell but their labour. It also assumes that more must be better, no matter whether it is pins, cars, armaments, processed foods or throw-away cameras. And above all, since only those transactions undertaken for money in fact register as *economic* choices, the model cannot account environmental degradation in any meaningful way.

The model states that, other things remaining the same, if demand for a product suddenly rises, its price will rise. When this happens, suppliers increase the supplies of the product, causing the price to fall. Thus the economy tends towards an equilibrium price where supply and demand are equal. Hence in theory capitalists and workers cooperate to produce goods for sale which are in high demand, being duly rewarded with profits or wages which they spend according to their own best advantage. Mushroom Man's sole *raison d'être* is to buy and sell for money.

## The Circular Flow – in theory and practice

Flat earth economists depict the economy as a circular flow.<sup>v</sup> People go to work for a productive business, selling their land (natural resources), labour and capital (plant and machinery). The firm combines *only resources which have been paid for* to produce goods and services for sale on the market. All the worker/producers are paid wages, salaries or dividends, and all the goods produced appear on the market for sale to the worker/producers now turned consumers. If the economy is in equilibrium, exactly the right amount of money will flow as incomes to consumers, so that all the products on the market are sold. The workers return to work for another round of production and consumption. For the person in the street, this analysis seems perfectly reasonable.

However, it is not particularly helpful as an indication of what *actually* happens for three reasons. Firstly, at the point where incomes are received, the goods available on the market have been months or years in the pipeline. The incomes available at that point in time will *not necessarily* equal the total costs of production of the goods offered for sale. Secondly, all motives except greed or desire for *money* are excluded from consideration in the study of economics. In the real world, people seek to cooperate with others in forms of good work, producing desirable products and offering caring, sharing, artistic and educational services. And thirdly, people are human beings, not commodities for sale on the market. Therefore, personal incomes cannot rightly flow from the sale of labour. However fancily dressed up as a professional 'salary', when all the implications are fully considered, the sale of one's time to an employing organisation is a form of oppression which is not conducive to the establishment of socially just and ecologically sane forms of economic association.

It remains, nevertheless, as truly heretical to challenge the very foundations of the circular flow as it was in O'Duffy's day. 'Of course' people must go to work to 'make' money which it is their right to spend, pay in taxes or donate as gifts. Any adult who does not 'make' money is skiving

off the system. It may be argued that women should be paid for housework, and that higher wages should be paid to women when they move into the formal economy. This is to miss the point entirely. The formal money economy is a tissue of complexity in which taxation, subsidies, state lotteries, international financial speculation, personal and public debt spread their tentacles like an all-enveloping mythical sea monster, profoundly incomprehensible to the vast bulk of those who get and spend within it.

Despite the abundance of cherished illusions, the formal economy does not exist to create well-being. **Currently, the formal economy exists to create money-wealth for some at the expense of others.** In denouncing the rich, however, women and low-paid workers of all types fail to recognise that in seeking rewards from the system, in working for *money*, their motives are no different from those of anyone else, rich or poor: they are working for what they can get out of the system *for themselves*. That being the case, they cannot justly complain that others get more out of the system than they do, nor can they complain that an irksome bureaucracy is increasingly degrading the quality of their working life. All economic agents are players in a giant game of Monopoly, in which they complain about their bad luck, but nevertheless accept the rules as pre-determined.

O'Duffy's ongoing relevance

Were he writing today, O'Duffy would still be describing the phenomenon of people being willing to work at anything, so long as a money reward is offered. It would, however, take another whole book to cover the additional follies of 'Rational Economic Man'. These include, among a host of other considerations:

- personal debt. While people spend their whole lives worrying about and trying to get out of debt, the system offers ready finance to get into debt.
- mortgages and rocketing house prices based on ephemeral valuations seemingly force families into double income lifestyles.
- the quest for funding: Workers in pressure groups and charities run around in ever diminishing circles seeking the money to keep going, spending on glossy promotional material whilst avoiding controversy which might cause statutory and voluntary donations to dry up.

Churches and faith-based organisations condemn poverty and injustice on the one hand, while at the same time, spending money on 'cheap' products from an exploitative system and receiving substantial donations from individuals who have become wealthy by playing the system at the expense, though possibly unwittingly, of the livelihoods of others. Meanwhile, works of art and collectables attract vast sums of money from rich individuals, sums of money bearing no relationship whatsoever to the original costs of production. The gut reaction is to say 'That is wrong! Stop! Call a halt! Set up a charity or an academic research project and spend the rest of your life seeking funding to keep it going'. This brings us to the key problem, a general refusal to investigate coupled with a readiness to dismiss alternatives as impractical and incomprehensible.

The money system has been likened to a wild horse which will, if untamed, take the rider wherever it wills. Money has, however, become so central to the social framework of the world economy that it cannot now be condemned as a 'bad thing' like drink or gambling, to be 'given up' or avoided. The answer is to set about 'taming' money so that it is fit for human use. And to do that, it is necessary to study its nature and the ways in which it actually operates.

It is essential that change should come from an informed standpoint. Mere defiance of the system can result in spectacular failure or absorption into the mainstream, both of which merely add

credibility to the *status quo*. Informed change will come as each individual dusts off their cosy belief systems which have hereto served as crutches and props for getting through life. These include “I’ve done my bit for charity,” “I’ve always worked (for money) for what I’ve got,” and “The Almighty will take care of everything in his own good time.” These and other cop-outs prevent people from seeking out common ground with others to work beyond the bureaucracy and selfishness of materialism. The call comes not only to people of faith as Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and others, but also to secular fundamentalists whose blind faith in a material world can often prevent them from seeking common ground with other faith-based groups. The stress on minor differences has bedevilled the quest for alternatives. Even groups campaigning for change find it easier to engage in slanging matches with adversaries holding similar but slightly different views, than to engage with the world at large where the *status quo* is taken as read. The embracing of one particular alternative can itself serve as a crutch or prop, providing a cosy ‘us versus them’ retreat from reality, and hence a failure to engage meaningfully in effective action.

### Conclusion

Fortunately, O’Duffy’s pessimism is not entirely justified. Social credit and O’Duffy’s own work form part of a rich literature of interweaving strands of thought on alternatives to the money dominated social framework. Impractical in terms of flat-earth economics, the alternatives are highly relevant for the development of a cosmological or world economy which would allow factors other than money to play a full part in individual and community policy formation.

The final chapters of *Asses in Clover*, in which O’Duffy depicts a social credit Utopia on the moon, provide an excellent basis for consideration of alternatives. Although not workable as a blueprint, the imaginary Utopia provides a thought-provoking contrast to the business-as-usual growth economics of warfare and ecological destruction. Potentially, links can be made with current work in progress by various groups and individuals, so that common ground can be established. For example, the ‘Nid’ (page 312) is based upon Douglas’ National Dividend.<sup>vi</sup> The proposal resonates with schemes for a Basic or Citizens’ Income which have been justified from detailed studies of the various grants and benefits already paid out through the current taxation system.<sup>vii</sup> The National Dividend concept approaches the problem from a different angle, offering the possibility that through debate and synthesis, alternatives to the orthodox paradigm might be realised with relative ease. In these and many different ways the new technologies and advances in science could be drawn into the service of the human community as a whole, rather than being developed on the basis of financial profitability for a few.

At the present time, the works of many alternative thinkers and writers are being brought out from obscurity and made available for study. In the process, common strands and positive connections are being stressed, rather than differences being emphasised. O’Duffy’s work provides a basic starting point for considering the historical evolution of the institutions of materialistic culture, with its specific patterns of rights, laws, economic association, education and training. In the meantime, a host of highly successful practical ventures demonstrate that it is possible for individuals to work autonomously together to bring about change. The challenge is to look thoughtfully beyond the pressing occupations of everyday life, finding time to engage with a diversity of others in the quest for new forms of association. For too long we have remained “asses in clover”, content to accept that ‘There Is No Alternative’ because we fear we may have to change our minds and our ways. Perhaps we have hesitated too long. Only time will tell.

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<sup>i</sup> I took this as the title of my third book, adding the word 'Really'.

<sup>ii</sup> See, e.g. H.J. Massingham's 1944 Introduction to Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*.

<sup>iii</sup> See Hammond's *The Labourer 1760-1832*.

<sup>iv</sup> e.g. Thorstein Veblen, J.K. Galbraith, C.H. Douglas and E.K. Hunt.

<sup>v</sup> See *The Politics of Money*, page 180.

<sup>vi</sup> See *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism*, page 54).

<sup>vii</sup> Details available: FH.