

OTHER THINGS EQUAL

The Earth Charter: A Reply

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What I intended to accomplish in my little squib on the Earth Charter was only to shake the confidence of environmentalists that *everything* the most radical amongst them believe is not *obviously true*. As Oliver Cromwell said to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1650, and as Professor England and I wish our readers and students would hear: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." I think Professor England would join me in that purpose.

Surely he would agree that the countries adopting capitalism with the most enthusiasm have prospered—take Chile, for another example. I think the studies of convergence that act as though prosperity was a natural phenomenon like rain are misled. True, North Korea has not converged on an American standard of living. But South Korea has. Which suggests that colonialism can't be it, either: Korea was subject to one of the most vicious colonialisms of the 20th century, competing in this sad contest with, say, the Belgian Congo.

I think socialism has proved to be a bad idea for poor countries. And environmentalism is socialism redux (really, how often does the arithmetic of Malthusianism need to be shown to be *economic* nonsense before we stop thinking it justifies a Chicken Little view of the future? I wish more people would read and consider the late Julian L. Simon's *The Ultimate Resource*).

I think Professor England is quite right that, say, Brazil seems right now to be moving democratically *away* from free markets. I am worried about a country I know a little and love a lot. I have just as much enthusiasm as Professor England does for democracy, and think in the long run that Brazilian workers will grasp (as Americans have this century past) that capitalism is a good thing. Yes, ownership *is* the key, as the Brazilians working to privatize the Amazon jungles grasp: a partly socialized Amazonia has been a world catastrophe for the environment, just as socialism in the former communist world was (look at the Caspian Sea, for example, to find what socialism does for Nature).

Other Things Equal, a column by Deirdre N. McCloskey, appears regularly in this *Journal*.

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“Broad participation in decision making” in Professor England’s mind is to operate through the compulsions of police and governments. I am always amazed at the enthusiasm of my socialist friends for governments, which are on the whole run by the rich or by thugs or by both. I wonder why they don’t think that deciding whether or not to buy hormone-free beef in a market is “broad participation,” broader, actually, than elections so easily stolen and corrupted, as in our own Dade County. But I long ago gave up thinking I could convert my many socialist friends. All I hope for is a flicker of doubt, which will improve both our arguments, by thinking it possible we may be mistaken.