



The Steady Stater

Newsletter of the Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy

Volume 2, Issue 3

July - September 2009

Politics, Schmolitics – It's Time to Take a Stand

Infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible. This concept is impeccably logical, and a certain percentage of the population readily comprehends it and rejects the mainstream economic dogma of infinitely expanding consumption. But this percentage is relatively small despite all the evidence of uneconomic growth (growth that costs more than it's worth). Why?

For starters, society is constantly inundated with advertisements and rhetoric proclaiming the necessity of growth and consumption. Marketers employ all kinds of psychological trickery to create a culture obsessed with materialism, a culture that does not understand the link between consumption and liquidation of natural resources. That's why CASSE developed the position on economic growth – to refute that rhetoric and explain two concepts in simple terms: (1) the conflict between growth and environmental protection and (2) the desirability of a steady state economy.

If there's one group of citizens most readily equipped to understand the CASSE position and embrace a steady state economy (an economic model based on relatively

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CASSE MISSION

The mission of CASSE is to advance the steady state economy, with stabilized population and consumption, as a policy goal with widespread public support.

We pursue this mission by:

- educating citizens on the conflict between economic growth and (1) environmental protection, (2) ecological and economic sustainability, and (3) national security and international stability;
- promoting a steady state economy as a desirable alternative to economic growth; and
- studying the means to establish a steady state economy.

OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

CASSE works hard to spread the message about the steady state economy as a desirable alternative to unsustainable growth. Here are a few recent examples.

- Dan O'Neill presented a paper entitled *The Global Financial Crisis: An Ecological Economics Perspective* at the European Society of Ecological Economics.
- Deb Schober, Brian Czech, and Rob Dietz met with numerous nonprofit organizations (including Friends of the Earth and the National Council on Science and the Environment) and even a Congressional staffer to deliver CASSE's message more widely.
- Rob Dietz delivered a seminar on economic growth, including an [editorial in the newspaper](#) in Eugene, Oregon sponsored by the University of Oregon Department of Sociology and www.oilempire.us
- CASSE volunteer Joshua Nelson has revamped the [CASSE blog](#) and posted several insightful new essays there.
- New video clips that feature Brian Czech discussing economic growth are available on [CASSE's YouTube channel](#)). ❖

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stable population and consumption of resources), it's got to be ecologists. These scientists are on the front lines of growth's assault on nature. Their peer-reviewed journals are overflowing with articles about habitat disruption, species extinction, and declining ecosystems. That is why CASSE has spent a great deal of energy trying to engage members of groups like the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) and the Ecological Society of America (ESA). CASSE has worked with ecologists in these societies to promote adoption of a position on economic growth. The point is to build a foundation of support from the scientific community for an honest discourse on the tradeoffs between economic growth and environmental protection.

That's where the complexities of politics come into play. In a world without political games, CASSE could forget about convincing people of the downsides of growth and focus on researching the best policies to achieve a prosperous steady state economy. The science is clear – ecological principles and physical laws confirm the impossibility of continuous growth, but political matters (not facts) guide human institutions, including professional scientific societies. CASSE advisor and member of the SCB governing board, David Johns, recently wrote a book on this topic entitled *A New Conservation Politics: Power, Organization Building and Effectiveness*. In it, he explains why facts alone don't motivate and mobilize people to care for the natural world.



CASSE staff and supporters have certainly found David's premise to be true. In SCB, we helped form a working group on ecological economics. In its brief existence, the working group attracted over 400 members and accomplished some impressive feats, including development of presentations, journal articles, and a symposium on the economics of biodiversity conservation. Despite such efforts, the SCB board of governors voted to disband the working group for "pushing forward on a particular perspective." Ironically the vote came directly on the heels of the highly regarded symposium. The perspective in question is that offered by the field of ecological economics – a perspective that recognizes limits to growth. Former officers of the working group have muddled through a politically challenging situation to achieve reinstatement. At this point, the working group can begin again to study and advance the principles of ecological economics and educate SCB members. But that doesn't mean that SCB is ready to take a position on the conflict between

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Steady Stater Quotable:

You cannot permanently pit an absurd human convention, such as the spontaneous increment of debt [compound interest] against the natural law of the spontaneous decrement of wealth [entropy].

-Frederick Soddy

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Adbusters Issue #85, Thought Control in Economics. Are you interested in scathing critiques of mainstream economic models? How about taking potshots at neoclassical economists? Do you want to learn about the pioneers of the economic paradigm shift? Are you looking for some good (and funny) ideas for economic activism? Then make sure you read the [latest Adbusters](#). ❖



POSITION ENDORSEMENT SPOTLIGHT

**Sierra Club
Winding Waters Group**



As the first Sierra Club unit to endorse the CASSE position, the Winding Waters Group (Indiana) has set a promising precedent for widespread Sierra Club engagement on the issue of economic growth. The Winding Waters Group joins a highly diverse group of conservation and ecological science organizations endorsing the CASSE position, including the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, National Center for Conservation Science and Policy, Conservation Planning Institute, La Fundacion Neotropica, and the Land Institute, among others.

Thanks to Greg Buck and Tim Wilson for taking leadership roles and making this endorsement happen. ❖

economic growth and biodiversity conservation.

In ESA, a similar working group proposed a position on economic growth. The merits of this position were vigorously debated at meetings, in email exchanges, and on the pages of the Society's journals. When it came time to write an official ESA position statement, it was done behind closed doors without the input of the working group. The position statement was released on July 21, and it's something of an enigma. We can celebrate the fact that a scientific organization recognizes the ecological impacts of economic growth, but after going through the political process, the final position incorporates oxymoronic ideas like "ecologically sustainable growth."

What's with the political turmoil surrounding a clear position on economic growth? Perhaps it comes from trusting too much in academic expertise. Ecologists are often turned off by the subjects of economics and finance. They aren't inclined to get involved in the policies of the Federal Reserve or the inner workings of the Treasury Department, so they leave those issues to the economists. But the vast majority of economists are followers of the infinite growth model – they have little or no training in ecology or physics. These economists can't conceive of an economy that gets better without getting bigger, and citizens and governments bow to their flawed advice.

When we examine where the advice of neoclassical economists has landed us – mired in an economic and environmental crisis of unprecedented proportions, the message becomes clear. It's time for our scientists to overcome the political barriers and tell it like it is... *economic growth cannot continue without undermining the life-support systems of the planet.* Lucky for us, growth is not the same as development. ❖



CASSE staff and colleagues sharing lunch after a symposium on economic growth and biodiversity conservation.

SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS

[A celebration of Herman Daly's work](#) presented in e-book form on the Encyclopedia of the Earth features these articles, among others:

Czech, B. 2009. [May there be Dalyists: politics for a steady state economy.](#)

Costanza, R. 2009. [Toward a sustainable and desirable future: a 30 year collaboration with Herman Daly.](#)

Goodland, R. 2009. [The world is in overshoot and what to do about it.](#) ❖



Rob Dietz presenting the steady state economy at the University of Oregon

ENCOURAGING WORDS

CASSE is delighted to receive positive comments from visitors to our website.

"I'm very happy to have found you. I am also delighted that you have [written] this position in such a clear and coherent way! Many thanks!"

"I was hoping that this kind of thinking was out there. I was so pleasantly surprised when my Google search of "steady state economy vs. growth" turned up your web site."

"Good luck in your challenge to change the world!" ❖

SIGNATORIES COUNTER

In this space, CASSE tracks the support for our [position on economic growth](#), which can be viewed and signed at www.steadystate.org/CASSEPositionOnEG.html

As of August 5, 2009:

The number of individuals who have signed the CASSE position on economic growth is

3,278,

the number of professional societies, government agencies, and science groups that have adopted positions on economic growth similar to CASSE's is

11, and

the number of private, corporate, nonprofit, and political organizations that have endorsed the CASSE position is

92. ❖

POLICY CORNER

In this space, CASSE provides a brief introduction to a policy idea that supports a steady state economy. A more in-depth resource is also listed for further study.

Distribution of wealth is about how we divide up the economic pie, and it's critically important for a steady state economy in which the pie is not growing. Economic growth has been used as an excuse to avoid dealing with poverty. Without growth, there are no more excuses. People who are too poor tend not to care about sustainability. If daily life is a struggle for basic needs, there's not much time or energy to consider the future. On the flipside, people who are excessively wealthy tend to consume unsustainably.

A key policy for ensuring fair distribution of wealth is to establish a cap on personal income. Such a cap would eliminate the worst cases of conspicuous consumption and curb overall throughput of resources in the economy. An income cap would also prevent the social unrest that comes from huge gaps between the "haves" and the "have nots."

See Chapter 22 in Daly, H. and J. Farley. 2004. *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications*, Island Press, Washington, DC. ❖

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

CASSE posts highlights from the Internet and news outlets on its website, www.steadystate.org. Check the news/events section of the website regularly for updates. Here are three notable items:

Rob Dietz [discussed the downsides of economic growth and the desirability of the steady state economy](#) with Diane Horn on the sustainability segment of *Mind Over Matters* on Seattle's KEXP radio.

The Venus Transit Authority Radio Show, a Los Alamos, New Mexico-based program about ecological economics and renewable energy, featured a live interview with CASSE Brian Czech.

In his [article about climate change](#), George Monbiot points out that colossal national debts make the transition to a steady state economy harder to achieve. He writes that debts "appear to commit us to either growth or default for at least a generation." Although Monbiot is right on target, he assumes that transition to a steady state economy is an accepted societal goal – a false assumption in just about every corner of the planet. ❖

FUNDING UPDATE

In this space, CASSE reports on organizational finances and efforts to raise funds.

CASSE's new executive board consists of some of the finest sustainability thinkers in the world. They will provide leadership for CASSE as we continue to seek reliable sources of operational funding and project grants.

With regard to reliable sources of operational funding, CASSE has initiated a [membership program](#). The standard fee for an annual membership is \$25, \$15 for students. Besides providing financial resources for CASSE's work, we are hopeful that the membership program will keep folks engaged with our efforts and help us spread the word about the desirability of the steady state economy. ❖



CASSE is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of the steady state economy. Please e-mail comments to info@steadystate.org. Thank you for reading the *Steady Stater* newsletter.