

# Information For Social Change

## Science & Technology For Utopias

### EDITORIAL

This issue of ISC aims to provide insight into 21st century science and technology initiatives designed for utopian societies. The intended audience is hands-on utopian makers, as well as those individuals and groups who share in the vision of utopian futures and who care to encourage adaptations, constructive intercultural dialogue, and international participation. Our idea for this issue of ISC was prompted by two of our interests: (1) in knowing more about general action research, development based participatory action research, case studies, and DIY (do-it-yourself) aspects of creating low cost, long term science and technology solutions to our present ecological mess, which also make for viable long term social justice (e.g., ethical aid, alternative transportation, green housing, and slow food movements) and the role of library and information workers and work therein, and (2) thinking about information ecology, sharing, and recycling as they relate to the production of human and natural resources and how best to achieve egalitarian societies in which there is free flow of information (e.g., social, cultural, communication, and information systems which combine ICT within egalitarian decision making processes in the context of non-proprietary systems and free information movements).

As we were editing this ISC issue, a survey on education for sustainable development (ESD) was posted online with the objective "to gather an inventory of critical issues that frequently emerge in sustainable development." The eight UNESCO themes are as follows: 1. Education for gender equality; 2. Education for health promotion; 3. Education for environmental stewardship; 4. Education for rural development; 5. Education for cultural diversity; 6. Education for peace and human security; 7. Education for sustainable urbanization; and, 8. Education for sustainable consumption. (See: <http://tinyurl.com/movr9w>) The relevance to our theme is powerful. Historically ideas about utopian societies have been expressed, or envisaged, within political, sociological, and philosophical contexts. Many of the most promising utopian dreams have also

been set within rural settings or post industrial contexts (e.g., in the William Morris novel *News From Nowhere*). With the exception of a very few novels that explore concepts of individual liberty within futuristic societies, science and technology has often been viewed as the problem which besets the dystopian world. This issue of ISC has a premise that in order to create a utopian society we will need to use the very best of science and technology in order to clean up our existing ecological problems on a global scale. What follows from that thinking is the realization that, in the long term, only the most sustainable science and technology will be able to maintain and nurture the kind of world we would like to inhabit; a world free of pollution and in which egalitarian society thrives. We offer here no utopian dreams or blueprints on how a utopian dream might be achieved. We include no futuristic manifestos. We did receive from our contributors some ideas, which upon reflection, just might prompt some of us to act on making something of a better world to live in.

Our issue of ISC begins with "SCIENTIFIC UTOPIAS" a fascinating literary philosophy styled article from the UK by Andrew Hudson, in which he asserts that while science offers a possible means for utopia, the application of social sciences is a necessary condition for democratic functioning in order that the science itself is not employed for perverted ends. This inquiry is followed by Ambers Burtis' pressing work from the USA titled "MANAGING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITIONAL CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS: IS TECHNOLOGY THE SOLUTION?" in which she discusses contemporary issues around the management of indigenous knowledge and traditional cultural expressions in the cultural network. She focuses on the need for ethical policies, critical approaches to status quo information management, efforts by the World Intellectual Property Organization and the American Library Association to draft policy in this area, and the urgency of collaboration with indigenous communities. Next, we include co-editor Martyn Lowe's musings in "IT'S NOT UTOPIA, BUT LIFESTYLE NOW". Herein Martyn muses on how lifestyle is the key to a better tomorrow and provides brief comment on recycling and current energy usage, good quality products, walking and public transport, vegetarianism, as well as wind power and solar energy. After that, we offer the vital work "DIGITAL DYSTOPIA: OVERCOMING DIGITAL DEPRIVATION IN THE UNITED STATES" by Cheri Carpenter, who critically examines the role that American public libraries play in the urgent context of the digital divide. She analyzes the ways in which

networked services can help disadvantaged communities and explores coordinated efforts of local municipalities and public libraries in the provision of public Internet access. Her work is followed by a personal and moving contemplation, "ON FREEDOM, THOUGHT AND TECHNOLOGY: A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE", (accessible in both English and Spanish language) written by a woman from Spain who goes only by the name of michelle. Richard Hayman's Canadian contribution, "HUMAN RIGHTS SOFTWARE: INFORMATION SUPPORT SOLUTIONS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, is a cutting edge exploration of how human rights centres and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have crucial information support needs, many of which can be met by the existing and ongoing development of information technology software applications. Richard examines emancipatory tools to determine: the technologies in use, emergent, and under development; their possible usage in the critical arenas under discussion; and, the greater effects of these technologies as they relate to social justice and information access in the global information society. He hopes to help raise awareness within human rights communities and information centres about the existence and availability of these tools, so that these groups may find appropriate and accessible solutions that match their information support needs. We round out the issue out with a short review of Claire Fauset's "Techno-fixes: a critical guide to climate change technologies" published in 2008 by Corporate Watch. And we close with a poignant poem by michelle (again in dual language). These international samplings represent just a tiny portion of the global discourse. We hope they warm your mind and hearts to further reflection and action.

*Martyn & Toni*

And for further reading, please consider:

Ursula K le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

**Amber Burtis (MLIS)** is an Assistant Professor and Health Sciences Librarian at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, USA. Her career has included

work in a number of library and non-profit settings where she has done outreach to American Indian, Hispanic and Appalachian communities. With an educational background in anthropology, ethnobotany, public health and library and information science, her interests lie in how individuals and cultures (from western health professionals to shamans and folk healers) conceptualize, create and use information related to health, medicine and science and the role librarians play in the lifecycle of knowledge production. She may be contacted by email at: [aburtis@lib.siu.edu](mailto:aburtis@lib.siu.edu)

**Cheris A. Stallings-Carpenter** received a Bachelor's of Science in Telecommunications from the University of Florida, USA and a Master's in Information Studies from Florida State University, USA. She is currently a PhD student at Walden University specializing in Public Health. She is also employed as a professional reference librarian in Lake City, Florida. She may be contacted by email at [cheris.carpenter@gmail.com](mailto:cheris.carpenter@gmail.com)

**Richard Hayman** recently completed the MLIS program at the University of Alberta, and holds an MA in Comparative Literature, also from the U of A. His current research interests include the intersection of LIS, human rights, social movements, and information and communication technologies, with an emphasis on open source and open access. He plans to pursue a career in academic librarianship, and may be contacted by email at [rhayman@gmail.com](mailto:rhayman@gmail.com).

**Andrew Hudson** was formerly employed as a Librarian by the London Borough of Waltham Forest in the UK. Having taken early retirement, he is currently volunteering his time to environmental projects. He may be contacted by email at [HUDSONA@live.co.uk](mailto:HUDSONA@live.co.uk)

**Martyn Lowe** helped to found ISC. He calls himself a Pragmatic Anarchist, which he defines as an idealist who wants to work on real world solutions to real world problems.

**Michelle** is a feminist and a member of the Spanish nonviolent anarchist movement. Since 1980, she has taken part in work by Amnesty International (Spain), Peace Brigades International (Guatemala, Nicaragua and Britain),

Movimiento de Objeción de Conciencia (Spain), War Resisters International (Britain), Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (Britain), and Women in Black (Madrid and Belgrade). She has devoted over 20 years to translating for free for grassroots organizations. In 2006, however, she published her first (paid) translation (in book form) thanks to Protection International - a study of nonviolent action in countries at war. A second upcoming translation with the same group will be the "New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders." She has created and administered the sites Mujer Palabra at [mujerpalabra.net](http://mujerpalabra.net) and Talking People at [talkingpeople.net](http://talkingpeople.net), which count with many people's contributions. With Mujer Palabra, she published a collection of her own poems in 2003 (chapbook) and hopes to reprint it in book form in 2009. Every now and then she takes part in artistic activities set up in independent spaces, reading my poems and other writings. She may be contacted by email at: [michelle@mujerpalabra.net](mailto:michelle@mujerpalabra.net)