

## PRELIMINARY DRAFT.

# PROPOSAL TO ADVANCE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HI-TECH-SELF- PROVIDING.

The approach to **economic development** that we have evolved during the last twenty years, and that we by now have applied in a considerable diversity of various countries places the greatest possible emphasis on the careful and step-by-step establishment of **A NETWORK OF CENTERS**. How exactly these are designated is not of the greatest importance. They can be called "**Centers for New Work and New Life**", "**Centers for the Evolution of a Just and Humane and Sustainable Economy**," or simply "**Centers for New Work**" or still numerous other names. Crucial to all of those that "we" (i.e. The New Work "Movement") have so far helped to establish are the following main characteristics.

**1. We always begin with a cautious, patient, highly "people-engaging" and "people-involving" foundational phase.** The world is littered with still-born, dead projects. The cemetery of intelligently conceived, expensive beginnings that have all come to nothing is vast. Many of these were completed "gifts" handed "down" to the local people by "development workers." They were simply left standing as soon as the AID or the NGO or the Peace-Corps facilitators departed. Solar panels became parts of goat-fences, weeds grew over machines, and tin-foil cookers were turned into toilets.

In our projects we never move one single stone, nor do we spend a single Dollar, till an intimate and full relationship with the people whose enterprise this is to become has taken root and has begun to grow. In twenty years we have developed a much tested array of methods with which we try to discover what the people with whom we work **really, really want**. Not what **we** have decided and planned in advance, but what **they** need, and also genuinely want and desire is the all-important foundation on which our projects are in every case based.

2. That we do not approach a group with a fixed and ready-made recipe, does not mean, however, that we come to them with **empty hands**. Far from that. We know from long and very hands-on experience that looking at people intensely and then asking them: What is it that **you really want?** is a disastrous prescription. Inevitably this produces a stone-dead silence. It is like turning on someone and saying: "Quick! Say something intelligent! Now!" The response to that, too, is usually also an embarrassed long wait.

In the beginning we explain a great deal about our previous projects. That thaws the initial ice, but it also builds some first layers of trust, for it becomes clear that we have worked in an unusually large range of diverse situations, and that quite often we have managed to achieve some clear and firm success. Naturally, that is only part of the intention.

This process also displays for the members of the new group a steadily growing, vivid set of **possibilities**. And that experience is for many a turning point. For most of them have come to a dead stop, exhausted in the deep sand, or the deep snow of **IM**-possibilities. To at long last encounter for once the exactly opposite is for them an enormously invigorating experience. In fact, this is so important for the take-off of our approach, that we often call the central and largest space in our Centers "**The Room of Possibilities.**"

This places the groups with whom we work into an entirely different **starting position**. They see a multitude of options spread out in front of their eyes, and the idea that a genuinely new beginning, a truly different life could indeed be within their reach begins to rise on their horizon. It must be said that some such **encompassing** promise, or sweeping hope is essential. For the many groups with which we have worked this has been a vital and urgent need.

Most of us have no conception of the depth of their discouragement, or of the force with which they have become convinced of their own incapacity. The pell-mell of small, limited, piecemeal offers is therefore unfortunately also in the main condemned to fail. If only one desperately small chink of an opening is offered to a group in a desperately poor neighborhood or desperately poor village – some

minutes more of electricity during the day, or some water that is one smidgen cleaner than the water they have used so – then a few will shuffle along passively for a while. But usually only as long as the Peace Corps member or the NGO workers carry the project. Once the village or the neighborhood is left to itself they will sink back down into the sad inertia in which they existed before.

3. The discouragingly high frequency with which miniature, pointillistic, one-little-change-at-a-time projects **fail**, has gradually persuaded us to aim whenever and however we can at **completeness and wholeness** with our Centers. In a nutshell: that is one of the most powerful reasons for **having** Centers in the first place! Isolated, incremental projects inescapably die. They are also fearfully energy- and money- consuming, and are therefore in the end wasteful even though they may seem frugal before the start.

This is also why we use the expressions “New Life,” or also “New Culture.” They, too, underscore that nothing less than the idea of an **entire** New Life, or New Culture will be sufficient. Of course, one imagines that in a truly ghastly situation any alleviation, no matter how minor is already significant and appreciated as a relief. But our, and the experience of many others does not bear this out. In the condition in which now millions and millions have slowly descended only the convincing and plausible offer of something that seems at once very **specific** and very **detailed**, but also **total** and **sweeping** has any chance to achieve a serious and lasting effect.

In our case (i.e. in the case of New Work) this wholeness emphatically includes the large and sometimes philosophical ideas which we have evolved during the last twenty years. That we can delineate a critique of the economies based on employment (on the “job-system) and can describe an **alternative** to the whole of these economies, and that we have in addition a great deal to say about how this alternative can be **achieved**, and about how very different the condition of the **great mass of the now poor** would be in that different, more intelligent, more humane and more cheerful culture all that has been very important in our work precisely with virtually illiterate, often homeless, and desperately depressed people.

This, too, once more reinforces the need for Centers. The concrete presence of an actual building, and especially of a building that is expressive and startling in its appearance visibly **embodies** these ideas. Its physical presence offers assurance that a new beginning indeed has been made, and that it is an encompassing and rounded new start.

4. An aspect of this effort towards **completeness** is that **all of the issues** which arise in connection with work and employment can be brought to the Center, and that different people within the Center will be competent to address the entire spectrum of them. The Centers for New Work have from their inception done **more** than other institutions that assist people with the obtaining of jobs. They have never been content to merely push clients that come to them into vacancies which by chance opened up. The concern with **the fit**, with discovering the skills and desires of people and to the greatest possible degree assisting them into jobs that they **want** to perform, has been one of the signatures of New Work.

5. Jobs are in our conception only one, and by no means the most desirable, structure that can organize work. The starting of **new business enterprises** has, therefore, been all along another aspect of the completeness at which our Centers have aimed. The range of our past experiences in that regard in fact is especially great. We have helped to establish any number of small service endeavors, some that sell jewelry over the Internet directly from Guatemala, some that market music over the Internet, (but not as Napster for “free,” but with micro-payments that go directly to the musicians.) Yet, on the whole we have taken the view that medium-sized businesses have a better chance to survive than the one-person micro-undertakings that were fashionable in the recent past.

Some of our successes much discussed in the media are a manufacturing shop which started by producing bricks out of hemp and clay, and is now moving towards making and marketing the **small machines** with which such bricks can be made. Or another manufacturing shop, in the small town of Zschopau, in the former East Germany that makes many of the products hitherto fashioned from Styrofoam out of the “waste” that arises during the milling of grain.

A much more ambitious long-time project on which we have worked for a number of years is a new hybrid automobile that is so highly elegant that we often refer to it as downright **erotic**. This car is at the same time much simpler and lighter than cars are now, but for us far more important is a quite different fact, namely the manner in which this automobile is **manufactured** and designed. It is an example of the now coming post-industrial phase, in which even cars are no longer manufactured in colossal factories, but progressively more in compact and far more efficient and economical **village and neighborhood shops**. This digital de-centralized mode of manufacturing is one main lynchpin of the entire structure of New Work and it will be explained in greater detail in the remainder of this sketch below.

The establishing of new business enterprises is thus emphatically **one part** of what such a center encourages and teaches and supports. In the case of South

Africa (and in particular in the case of the **Province of the Northern Cape**) preliminary explorations of a number of such new medium sized new business enterprises have already begun. Among these are: the making of cement-blocks, but also (far more ambitiously) the making of cement with a new small, **mobile**, computer controlled Container-Factory (that could move from village to village and make the needed cement **on site**.) Possibly the manufacturing of generators, windmills, water-pumps and water-filters for purification. The **re-manufacturing** of the ghastly Van-Taxis that are a disgrace to the country and a torture for the passengers. The development of **small-scale mining**, together with the manufacturing of the special machines (drills, etc.) needed for that. Hopefully, although perhaps in the more distant future, the manufacturing of simple “**community refrigerators**,” of simple “**community washing-machines**, and of other domestic technologies, such as gas-burners or tools.

**6. The fundamental concept which we are proposing includes that one or another of these business ventures develop out of each of the Centers, and that these businesses provide (after the first largely government funded start-up phase) the required cash. The flow of some hard cash will of course be needed. The single most central point about these centers, however, is simply that this cash will not be their sole support. Part of the work and part of the support of a group linked to a Center will come from the practice of Hi-Tech-Self-Providing.**

**7.** To emphasize this once more: the development of new business enterprises is **only one** of the spectrum of **many functions** that these centers fulfill. They also assist people in the training and preparation and finding of **jobs** - especially, wherever possible in the finding of jobs they **really, really want**. But these Centers do **much more**: There are also facilities for the washing of laundry, but also for the taking of baths, also community facilities for cooking and often a restaurant. If the group desires this there can also be a **Community Bank**, and naturally some of the space can be used also for the performance of dances and music and the making of art, and of course also for the playing of games and the practice of sports.

Separate from this and of special importance are the rooms in which computers but also TV sets and video cameras are made available for the use of the members of the group. The **common- group- use** of everything from washing machines to computers is far cheaper and more economical than the private **mono-ownership** of all of these “consumer goods”.

8. The modern information technologies perform a uniquely significant role in the Centers. Each of these Centers is among all other things **also** a school. A school in which the students can **see and hear everything** that has ever been put on video-film or CD's - from the most recent cinema to all of Shakespeare's plays to the lectures given at MIT, together with music from all parts of the world - represents naturally an entirely different opportunity from the typical one-room village school which one can hear from two blocks away, since all the children in unison sing-song one and the same text that they do not understand.

9. **The emphatic diversity of the individual Centers. The fact that each of them is developed separately in response to the unique cultural, climatic, and natural resource conditions of one special group and one special place.** This diversity is of course a direct consequence of our **not** starting from finished and fixed recipes, but of our discovering instead through a complex process that requires much give-and-take what indeed would **really** be useful in one given setting, and what in that particular setting the people fully and intensely and seriously **want**. What a group in one place seriously needs and wants differs from what other groups in other contexts need and want and each Center is therefore different from every other.

10. **The most decisive characteristic of these Centers can be explained. Namely, above all else they offer the required foundation, the needed wherewithal, the shops and the machines and crucially also the other people, the larger group that are indispensable for the practice and the activity of Hi-Tech-Self-Providing.**

Most essentially this means that a very large portion of what is needed, by no means just for **subsistence**, but on the contrary for a full, pleasurable, modern, cheerful and exuberant life will be **made** by the members of the group who are linked to a Center **themselves**. In the crassest words: nothing at all happens except through **their work, their doing, and their own making**. If food is needed then ways will be found for **them** to grow it (even if they do live in cities - "urban agriculture" - or water is scarce - "perma-culture.") If water needs to be conserved, then we will connect them with the needed technologies so that **they** can **make** filters to re-cycle water, or **build** dry compost toilets. If houses need to be built then they will not only **make** the bricks and **lay** them. There will be one of the new **Mini-Cement Factories** with which **they** themselves can **make** the cement.

Analogously for very much else. If supplementary electricity is needed then there now are techniques and machines with which generators can be "**village-**

**manufactured,**” if tools, or stoves, or refrigerators or washing machines turn out to be items that people want and urgently need, then machine-shops (with newfangled small computer controlled machines) can be set up in which people can **make** even these things for their own and their immediate communities use.

This requirement, that people themselves do the **work** is decisive on several quite distinct counts. For one, it relates back to the enormously high rate of failed projects. For the idea of **Self-Providing** creates an entirely different atmosphere from that in which most projects begin. One could say that **unemployment** literally **stops** on the first day, for people will be **working** from that day on. {{ In this way it does much to avert the single greatest danger of all: namely that the project is simply left standing as soon as the “AID” or the “NGO” people pack their bags and disappear. In our view it is a fatal mistake to present a **complete, finished product** (no matter what this product is) to any group of people. Just as to merely involve them in the “decision-making-process” falls hopelessly short. (We all know how mind-numbing most “meetings” are.) People from the very inception must be engaged in the **work, in the actual creation** of the project. Nothing short of that can assure that it will truly become **their own** project!

But the significance of **Hi-Tech-Self-Providing** goes far beyond this. It is no exaggeration to say that it is **the fork, or the railroad switch** that leads not only to a different form of work, but from there into a different **economy, and society and culture.**

This can be seen from several different vantage points. One way of seeing it graphically and with great force is to spend one day in one of the vast slums that surround virtually all of the cities of the “Third World,” whether this is Bombay or Rio or Kiev or Johannesburg. One flash of clear thinking makes it palpably obvious that all of these millions will of course not ever be handed “jobs” in our sense, with decent wages, and health insurance, and pensions and regular vacations in the Caribbean Sea. No one in any serious way believes this for a moment! By now we know how much capital is needed for the creation of a single “good” job (we also know that this sum steadily rises), and beyond this there would be the unimaginably immense task of education, and still more the not even thinkable task of cultural transformation. So, of course no one **believes** this!

But the astounding, mindboggling and truly amazing fact is that this is never admitted. That it is never countenanced. There is an extensive literature on the different approaches to development, but all of these in unison **identify** development with the “creation of jobs,” with “the creation of employment.” (Even Stiglitz does this in his Globalisation and it’s Discontents, and Sen in his

Development as Freedom.) Whether this goal for the vast majority could ever be **reached** – that question is never straightforwardly and directly raised. And the reason for this of course could not be simpler. There is no niche or corner in one's conceptual framework for a seriously competing **alternative**. So the question does not even need to be smothered or denied – it is literally “unthinkable.” One need not fear it. It cannot be asked.

(This is one point where **philosophy** becomes suddenly useful and relevant to what we are doing. For the understanding of these **seeming** conceptual impossibilities, of these **apparent imprisonment's** in the mousetraps of arbitrarily imposed cages of rigid ideas are part of philosophy's natural turf; are part of the subject matter with which it plays.)

That is one way of seeing the dramatic significance of the idea of **Hi-Tech-Self-Providing**. For it breaks out of the cage of this framework. It represents an **alternative** (and a seriously competing **alternative**) to development through the creation of jobs.

To put it bluntly: We know about the creation of employment. One spreads out offerings of every kind in the hope that some of the international corporations will be beguiled and will settle in one's country or town. They – so the prayerful mantra goes – will be handing out the largesse of the jobs and prosperity will trickle down to the people from the heights of the board-rooms. That this hope has been a pipe-dream in ever so many parts of the world we have by now learnt only too well. But so far one could only raise one's arms in misery and dismay. What **else** was one to do? One was trapped between two devils or two very deep seas.

That has now changed. There now is an **alternative: Development not only through the creation of jobs, but through a dual approach, one that combines (a) the evolution of a network of Centers in which people will directly provide for 75% of their needs, with (b) the development of new enterprises in which people will earn the cash for the 25% that still remain.**

These two very different approaches can now be compared. The most telling, first comparison simply **contrasts the costs** of the two with each other. How expensive is the creation of jobs? There are a great number of often mentioned examples that give one an approximate first idea. One anecdote was told by the MEC in Kimberly, South Africa when I was there. An amount of several millions was spent to improve a mining facility in that region. In the middle of the Opening ceremony the MEC turned to his neighbor and in an excited whisper asked: How many jobs did these millions actually create? The answer was **exactly eight!**

Other examples come from the automobile, or the steel industry where tax-abatements, gifts of real estate, subventions, and emergency bail-out rescue packages have been a common experience for years. In much of Europe the entire complex connected with mining is an especially egregious case, while the lucrative government supports for the **farmers** are a still more flagrant example – the farmers of the USA and of Germany and of France who receive so much **AID** that the farmers in Mexico drown helplessly in mass-bankruptcies. With this we still have not mentioned the huge sums made available for the rescue of entire economies (just now of Brazil). And even all of these are only hints of the mere **cash-expense** pumped into the sagging number of jobs. In my book on New Work I have written in detail about the staggering **other sacrifices** made for the sake of employment. These stretch from the fighting of wars – recall how the Second World War helped to end the Great Depression – right to the excesses of advertising. We all know that without advertising consumption would decrease and that unemployment would then rise still higher. To prevent this we sold large parts of the public media, of the newspapers, magazines and of radio and TV into the sex-slavery, the prostitution of advertising.

How do these **costs** associated with the creation of **employment**, compare to the **costs** involved in economic development achieved through **Hi-Tech-Self-Providing** and New Work? Much can be compressed into one straightforward **equation**.

In very approximate terms we could say that the cost of one Center for New Work and New Life run to about one million Dollars U.S. All of the Centers we have so far established are naturally used more intensely by some groups than by others. The analogy is to a set of concentric circles. The approximate average of all of these different circles is in the neighborhood of one thousand people: i.e. the life of several hundred people is improved quite dramatically and in many different ways, while a far larger group which comprises maybe three or even five thousand people benefits also, but to a decidedly lesser degree. This means that with one Million Dollars one can create the foundation for a full and enjoyable life for around one thousand people. The pivotal point is that one of course cannot create anything like One Thousand jobs with an investment of one Million Dollars. Conceivably it might be useful to put some figure on this: Just for the purpose of having some kind of picture one could formulate it in terms of a ratio: and a rough approximation might be to 1%.

If one has a very sharp eye for a new market and a good deal of luck one might be able to create ten jobs with an investment of one Million. That would make the basic ratio, or the basic equation One Thousand to ten. Beyond this one could of course compare the **quality** of the created work. Ironically, on the side of employment, that quality much of the time is of course very poor. In spite of the

sacrifices people end up doing work that they experience as a “mild disease.” They count the days or months till it will end. In a Center the quality would be incomparably higher. One could choose among a vast variety of different tasks and could of course also change a very great deal. Not only that. To give assistance in helping people discover what it is that they “really, really” want to do is in each Center a major concern in which people are trained and experienced and skilled. That there are all manner of practical limitations goes without saying, but that on the whole the experience of one’s work would be totally different from how most people experience their jobs, that is just about guaranteed.

That these are only the first beginnings of a long series of possible comparisons is of course evident. Indeed, this is already contained in the idea that New Work offers the set of stepping stones which lead up like a staircase to an entire more humane and more cheerful culture.

SOME OF THIS MORE SPELLED OUT. EXAMPLE OF GREATER AND LESSER INVOLVEMENT.

VERY MAJOR DIFFERENCE: NOT THE SAME BARRIERS AND BARRICADES. CREATION OF EMPLOYMENT DIFFICULTIES ON EVERY SIDE: MARKET BUT ALSO ABILITIES AND SKILLS OF THE PEOPLE AT HAND. MARKETS THE REALLY BIG PROBLEM. EXCESS CAPACITY. AND MY EXPERIENCE WITH CARS. CENTRALLY OF COURSE THE SHEER DIFFERENCE IN MONEY. NO HOPE TO ACHIEVE Anything remotely like ONE THOUSAND JOBS WITH AN INVESTMENT OF ONE MILLION. (CERTAINLY NOT IN THE NORMAL AND USUAL CASE)

AND THEN DO COMPARE THE QUALITIES. THE IRONY WORK THAT THEY DO NOT WANT - AND WHAT ELSE AND CASINOS - AND EVER MORE DUBIOUS AND EVER WORSE. WHILE BEGINNINGS OF THE QUALITY OF THE LIFE OF NEW WORK.

MORE ON THE BUSINESS ENTERPRISES - THAT THERE IS A GREAT NICHE. THAT BOTH OF THESE COME TOGETHER. THAT THE CENTERS FORM A NETWORK AND ASSIST EACH OTHER AND THAT THEY BECOME A NEW MARKET.

OF COURSE ALSO RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT OF ALL MANNER OF PEOPLE AND THUS A RISING BRIGHT HOPE.

The long-tried attempts to start up economic development through the creation of employment have not only failed, that model becomes more suspect and problematic with every passing month. As Hi-technology and automation continue their march the capital and the skills required for modern jobs continue to rise, and the creation of jobs therefore becomes ever more expensive and difficult.

We represent an **Alternative** in which the operating dynamic is entirely the reverse. The progress of technology diminishes the need for not highly-skilled human labor. But that same progress **increases** the possibilities of **Hi-Tech-Self-Providing**. The sheer number but also the quality of the goods that a group can **make for themselves through the use of advanced technologies continues to grow**. The model of economic growth that we propose therefore gains in plausibility and in strength just as the model based on employment becomes ever weaker and less convincing.

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