

THE CASE AGAINST CONSUMER RECYCLING



BY ERIK GHENOIO

The natural resources of the world are dwindling. Through most of human history, natural processes alone were sufficient to recycle the waste produced by our species.

Now, however, the Western economic system centered on the United States is too consumptive and too large for nature to compensate. Reduction of individual consumption or the number of individuals could allay this problem, but the only absolute solution would be the observation of complete recycling of all society's waste.

The current approach to this end consists mostly of local consumer recycling programs. The satisfying and commendable ethic behind consumer recycling is that everyone should assume responsibility for his own waste.

In a complex society, however, individual responsibility must be an abstract concept as part of common interest. Direct consumer recycling can never be a complete solution. Even if

all parts of society could be motivated to participate, (which is not now the case), this can not include all people or any person all the time. A total recycling system, unlike consumer recycling, must work even when people are indifferent to its requirements.

There are several ways to organize a total recycling system. One way is to establish a centralized governmental agency to turn all waste into reusable form for redistribution. This plan would take a long time to implement and would be prohibitively expensive.

Another possibility is to allow private industry to recycle waste itself. This would take the form of a gradual replacement of raw materials corporations with similar pre-used materials ventures such as landfill "mining" companies. This system would cost less than a centralized agency but take even longer to establish, becoming complete only as resources are so exhausted as to be impractic-

cal to collect.

A third, superior alternative is to make manufacturers responsible for the things they make as they make them. Over-consumption is the creature of over-production; the only way to ensure that everything consumed is recycled is to account for everything produced.

This total solution would be far faster and in the end, far cheaper than the other methods. It would take the form of an accelerated version of the private industry plan, supervised by a much smaller version of the federal agency plan.

In plain words: the way we recycle now is wrong. Consumers will not and should not recycle their own waste. We throw away too much because manufacturers want it that way. No one manufacturer can recycle what it makes because then its products will cost more than its competitors. All manufacturers must be made accountable to recycle what they produce. Only then will all waste

be recycled appropriately.

The greatest objection to the producer accountability solution comes from corporate capitalism. Capitalism is a shortsighted system: its interest lies in delaying costs for as long as possible and diverting responsibility away from itself. For this reason, consumer recycling is the darling of self-satisfied activism.

The slogan "Think Globally— Act Locally" has been turned into a trite lie. Separating trash or throwing this newspaper into a recycling bin is not assuming social responsibility, but dodging it. Consumer recycling advocates, far from fighting a crusade against a wasteful and irresponsible mode of living, have unwittingly become the mechanism of its perpetuation.

No recycling is better than what we have now. "Recycling centers" and their ilk do nothing but make us feel like we've done our part. They are a mockery of meaningful action. •

Of Shoes and Ships and Nasty Housing Conflicts—

A True Fairy Tale from the Kingdom of Clark...

as told to Mandy Reyna

Once upon a time, in a land right outside your door, someone felt an injustice had come to pass and that it probably was not the first time something of this nature had occurred. Follow along, dear reader, and decide for yourself if the maiden in this story is right in feeling what she does.

In our Clark kingdom, we go about daily activities not really noticing all the dark and mysterious things that happen. It's an appearance that the Gate Keepers hold up to visiting people and their families. Their job is to try to get as many new subjects into the Kingdom as possible. Which there is no fault in, of course, because without these subjects, our Kingdom would be of no real substance.

Assisting with the upkeep of the Kingdom are the Blue Knights, Lords of Housing, Lords of Academia, and of course, the King. Now, the Blue Knights are often the targets of many subjects' complaints to the King. But this is not a tale about a complaint against the Blue Knights, but rather two subjects' complaints against the Kingdom as a whole.

One night, Serena^{*1} had returned to her domain after an evening of entertainment with the local jesters in at Central Grind. As she ascended to her room, she heard words being exchanged between two other residents, Cecil* and Edgar*. Cecil walked out of his encampment and walked toward the dining area to calm down. Edgar followed him out and proceeded to hurl a nobleman's sitting object at him. At this moment, Serena interjected for Edgar to stop.

Rather than ceasing, Edgar accosted the maiden with harsh words and pushed her toward the main wall of the domain. As he walked away, Serena sent for the Blue Knights to settle the matter.

The Blue Knights responded immediately. When they entered the dwelling, the Knights made sure Serena and Cecil remained unharmed, as well as the other subjects in the domain. Edgar was then spoken to, and warned about being taken to the Dungeon if they were called for again. Upon leaving, the Knights suggested that Cecil find a different location for slumber that evening.

The following day, Serena and Cecil went the Lords and Ladies of Housing and Academia with their concerns about Edgar. The situation was out of their hands if Edgar was to be removed from their place of residence. The Lord of Housing informed them that the situation must be worked out with the Landlord and the Assistant Landlord of their residence.

Feeling that this was no way to deal with a possible dangerous individual, the two left the Kingdom and traveled to the Land of Justice a few miles away. Here, they were granted Documents of Restraint which would be made known to Edgar.

Edgar moved to a different part of the Kingdom after a week's time. In this week, Serena and Cecil were not aware that the Landlord had met with Edgar and had decided that it would be best if he moved. Outraged, Serena felt that it was unjust that she and Cecil were not informed of the ruling.

Serena believes that it is unfair that the Landlord was left to make the ultimate ruling rather than the Lords of Housing. At the time, as

well, she was made aware of other violent acts that had occurred throughout the Kingdom yet remained resolved quietly.

How is it that our Kingdom is believed to be as Harmonious as the Gate Keepers make it out to be? There are many incidents on the Kingdom that will probably remain unspoken about. These are what we should all be aware about, that our lives aren't simply toiling in our academia or gossiping with fellow subjects, but that there are things that happen that should be made public.

It is you, dear reader, who has to choose whether or not to remain in silence about them. Talk to the people around you, some of us know what is going on. Tell this tale to those who don't. Those who decide how to run the Kingdom may be looking out for the general well being of all the subjects, but it is the subjects who suffer if they do not know what they are being protected from. •

¹— A subject visiting the Kingdom for a year from a faraway land.

*—Subjects' names have been changed to protect their privacy.