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Interesting philosophical discussion on constitutional development

Hills, Rodger. *The Consensus Artifact*. Randwick, N.S.W.: Astro Projects, 2007. 191 p. ISBN 9780646478296 (pbk). \$34.95.

This book is about a universal constitution, broad enough to encompass the idealistic goals of society and diverse and flexible enough to cope with the disparities in society. After the introduction, it is arranged in three parts followed by a reference list, and glossary and index. Part one is The ICHP (International Constitutional Harmonization Project); part two is hypothetical interviews; and part three is the universal constitution. It is aimed at interested and concerned citizens, students, legal and political professionals.

The author states that he has held senior executive positions in the Australian manufacturing sector, with his voluntary work revolving around social justice themes, setting up a local exchange trading system, energy efficient housing development, and housing for the disabled. He had little direct exposure to politics and the workings of government before researching and writing *The Consensus Artifact*.

The premise of the book is based on a hypothetical non-government organization, the International Constitutional Harmonization Project (ICHP). It provides a governing structure of society, and also meets the expectations of its citizens. There is a strong ethical stand on social justice issues, sustainability, alternative monetary and taxation systems, stamping out corruption, limiting corporate power and making people and government fully responsible for their actions.

Part Two explores the ideal basis of the hypothetical constitution by a question and answer technique covering the broad subjects such as:

- foreign investment
- consumerism and consumer self-interest
- valuing the real cost of production
- import-export draft
- scientific error
- fair and alternative taxation systems, and
- Corporate welfare.

A summary section links each of these topics to the section in the hypothetical constitution as written up in Part Three. After discussing several aspects of taxation in Part Two, for example, the constitution (Part Three) describes the role of the Taxation Office is to collect revenue from only four sources:

- A resource value tax – a tax on the yearly rental value of biota and forces of nature that are in limited supply;
- An artificial legal persons tax – tax on all the expenses, except labour, of profit making artificial legal persons;

- A Hazard tax – a tax of products that are designed to maim, kill, or cause pollution, have serious adverse health effects, cause weakening of the natural or built environment; and
- A major financial Transactions Tax – a tax on all major private financial transactions not involving the purchase of goods and services.

Technical accuracy in this fable is replaced by imaginative hypothesis. The glossary and index are entwined, providing definitions and references.

It is designed as a guide to new governments of today that are struggling to form a new constitution. As the author confidently states he believes a high standard of education is required to implement the ICHP; an understanding across various government and political processes. Then perhaps it may not be a hand book for the American philosophy of distributing democracy to third world countries.

This is a first edition. Comparisons could be made with the current constitutions of various countries. The works of historic societal thinkers from ancient Greek Plato to modern day political philosophers are all appropriate. Many of the authors listed in the Reference List have been the inspiration for modern political thought: Kenneth Arrow, Jared Diamond, Charles Handy, Mungo McCallum, Ricardo Semler, and films such as Achbar's The Corporation. It offers the hope that a future that is fairer and a more advanced human society is possible now.

Jennifer Connor
Australian Taxation Office
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