

Global Reformers

by Matteo G. Luccio

A review of *Planet Champions: Adventures in Saving the World: New Paths to Peace, Prosperity, and Human Rights*, by Jack Yost (Portland: BridgeCity Books, 1999); 196 pages; \$20.

In the face of corporate greed, governmental inertia, and public cynicism, a small, dedicated, and intelligent cadre has been working steadfastly to make national and global institutions more responsive to environmental and human needs. Jack Yost was among them. In *Planet Champions*, he intertwines autobiographical narrative, political analysis, and profiles of twenty people he had met who were devoting their lives to the good of the planet.

Yost's commitment began when he left home to join a seminary at age 14. His life was cut short by sudden death in October, shortly after publishing this book. In the intervening four decades he edited the Portland State University student newspaper, attempted in vain to start a business to finance his activism, founded the Oregon Peace Studies Consortium, and directed the World Association for World Federation. This last job was in New York City, where Yost, a life-long Oregonian, insisted on riding his bicycle. In his twenties, he lost his religious faith and replaced it with an intelligent, abiding optimism and the notion that life is about finding meaning and purpose in some great cause.

Profiling his champions' ideas, often by quoting them, Yost describes a sophisticated vision of radical reforms including the abolition of war and poverty consciously designed to parallel the abolition of slavery.

As a dual antidote to poverty and environmental degradation, Yost turns to



provided by Jack Yost

Yost on the coast.

Henry George's proposal to heavily tax land that common heritage of all humanity which has been appropriated by a few. He devotes a chapter to George's ideas, career, and vast popularity in the late-19th century and to the establishment's reaction: the birth of neo-classical economics. Yost cites Jeffery Smith, president of the Geonomy Society, who calls the land-tax development model a little-known secret that has worked every time it has been tried. (Smith edited the forum on Environmental Economics in the winter 1998 issue of *Oregon's Future*.)

Yost, like his champions, acknowledges that this century has been bathed in blood, that much of the world is in disastrous conditions, and that global reformers face enormous obstacles. He notes that while the end of the Cold War engendered a palpable sense of relief, this obscures the continuing threat of nuclear holocaust and the urgent need to take further action to eliminate it. On the continued

failure of the world community to prevent genocide, Yost cites Sir Brian Urquhart's conclusion that because 18 U.S. Rangers died in Mogadishu [in 1994] over a half million people in Rwanda lost their lives.

Still, Yost believes that this century has gradually eroded the traditional sovereignty of nation states while building up something radically new: the sovereignty of human rights. As evidence, he details the campaigns that led to the creation of the permanent International Criminal Court in 1998 and the treaty to ban land mines, signed by 125 countries in 1997. In each case, he stresses, the key actors were non-governmental organizations. Their growing prominence and sophistication was first displayed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, where citizens tracked every decision, every procedure, every paragraph in the development of this global agenda... People from all over the planet were designing the future. Ultimately, that is the challenge. Where to begin? Use international organizations and agencies... as building blocks for a new world order. Global conferences on the environment, women's rights, and poverty can light the way forward. Get everybody involved.

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