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HOW GUERNSEY BEAT THE BANKERS

by

EDWARD HOLLOWAY.

The story of how the Island of
Guernsey created its own money,
without cost to the taxpayer,
and established a prosperous
community free of debt.



New Arcade and Market Place St. Peter's c. 1840

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A NOTE ON THE WRITER, EDWARD HOLLOWAY.

Holloway was a founder member and has been Honorary Secretary of the Economic Research Council since 1955. He also edits a quarterly journal— Britain and Overseas.

He became interested in economic and monetary policy in the depression years of the 1930s and founded the Economic Reform Club and Institute in 1936. The main objective of this organization was attained with the setting up by H.M. Government of the Radcliffe Committee on credit and currency in 1957.

Holloway has made a special study of economic questions particularly in relation to monetary policy and also international trade and payments. Over the years he has lectured to hundreds of audiences including fifth and sixth forms at many of the leading public schools, the R A F , Navy etc. He is joint author of "Money: The Decisive Factor", published in 1959. Other publications include "The Case for an Atlantic Free Trade Area" in 1967, "Inflation and the Function of Monetary Policy in Britain" in 1971 and "Honest Money: The Case for a Currency Commission" in 1976.

He sponsored a 'Programme for National Recovery' in 1967. This programme was supported by 19 economists and industrialists and resulted in the publication of live research reports which have played a significant part in changing the climate of opinion in the sphere of economic and monetary policy.



New Arcade and Market Place, St. Peter Port, c.1840.
After a lithograph published by M. Moss, bookseller,
Guernsey.

PREFACE

by James Glyn Ford

This pamphlet, "How Guernsey Beat the Bankers", is a reprint of one issued in 1958 by the Social Credit Movement. It tells how the Guernsey States from 1819-1836 manipulated the issue of notes to allow a number of public works to be carried out — including both the construction of the Guernsey Market and the rebuilding of Elizabeth College — without increasing public debt. The details are contained within the pamphlet itself. The author, rightly, saw this as an anticipation of the idea of *social credit*. As such, for the very different audience that will read it now, a very brief background to the ideas and history of the Social Credit Movement in Britain may prove helpful.

The Movement's origins lay with the economic theories of Major C.H. Douglas, who early this century wrote a number of books explaining that the then current economic problems were caused by the arbitrary control of the money supply by the banks and bankers. He proposed that money backed by gold or paper should be replaced by notes backed by the real wealth of nations, their goods, plant and machinery. A consequence of this would be that the parasitic role of bankers in the economy would be removed and the economy would as a result expand.

Social Credit ideas have never become widely accepted although in the 1930s they gained some currency. In 1929 a Social Credit Party was established in Britain under the leadership of John Hargrave. The 1930's was a time of political upheaval, and the Social Credit Party's paramilitary Greenshirts added another hue to the colourful street demonstrations of the decade, with the marching and countermarching of Moseley's Blackshirts, the red shirted Independent Labour Party and the khaki of the communists. At their peak in 1933 the Greenshirts could call on 10,000 supporters for their demonstrations in Britain's cities. At times the personification of their campaign of 'out with the Vipers' (i.e. the bankers) took on an anti-semitic flavour.

The beginning of the end for them came in 1936 with the passing of the Public Order Act which banned political uniforms. Deprived of the presence that came with the impact of marching uniformed ranks they, along with their

colourful counterparts, faded from the scene. All that remains in Britain now is a small group of enthusiasts. Elsewhere in the English speaking world the Social Credit Movement has had a fitful existence. Both New Zealand and Canada have elected Social Credit M.P.'s to their national parliaments. At provincial level in Canada they have had strong support in Quebec, and in Alberta formed the government. Even in these areas they are now in decline.

INTRODUCTION

The announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his budget speech that he intends to set up a committee to inquire into monetary and credit policy is bound to focus attention on the workings of our financial system. Over the years there have been many interesting monetary experiments undertaken in various parts of the world.

These have mainly taken place in small communities but they are none the less of interest. For example there was the experiment in the island of Guernsey in the period following the Napoleonic wars. There were also experiments in the towns of Swanenkirchen in Bavaria and Worgl in the Austrian Tyrol which took place in the years of depression following the 1914-18 war. Another interesting example is the amazing development which took place in the island of Gosaba off the coast of India. These and similar experiments had one factor in common. A depressed and unproductive community was changed in a comparatively short while into an active prosperous and happy community.

The story of the island of Guernsey is particularly interesting from our point of view for it is a relatively easy matter to see for oneself the actual buildings which were created — as a result of these experiments. For example the Market House and Elizabeth College were two examples of the result of the sensible money policy adopted by the island Parliament in the early part of last century. Other improvements included better roads, a modern sewage system; all of which were constructed without a debt being incurred by the community.

These experiments have a considerable bearing upon our present monetary policy which, as is being increasingly realised, is in need of considerable revision. We make no apology therefore for re-telling the story of the successful monetary experiment in Guernsey.

THE GUERNSEY MARKET SCHEME.

Our story opens in the year 1815. It was a year of considerable difficulty for the people of Britain but the people of the little island of Guernsey were particularly hard hit. The effects of the Napoleonic wars had resulted in a state of despair on the part of the island community due to the acute economic distress then prevailing. The

following extract from a document presented by the States (as the island Parliament is called) to the Privy Council speaks very eloquently on the state of affairs:

"In this island, eminently favoured by nature, nothing has been done by art or science towards the least improvement; nothing for the display or enjoyment of local beauties and advantages; not a road, not even an approach to the town, where a horse and cart could pass abreast; and the deep roads only four feet six inches wide, with a footway of two or three feet, from which nothing but the steep banks on each side can be seen, appeared solely calculated for drains to the waters which, running over them, rendered them ever yet deeper and narrower. Not a vehicle, hardly a horse kept for hire, no four-wheeled carriage existed of any kind, and the traveller landed in a town of lofty houses, confined and miserably-paved streets from which he could only penetrate into the country by worse roads, left the island in haste and under the most unfavourable impressions.

"In 1813, the sea, which had in former times swallowed up large tracts, threatened, from the defective state of its banks, to overflow a great extent of land. The sum required to avert the danger was estimated at more than £10,000, which the adjoining parishes subject to this charge were not in a condition to raise. The state of the finance was not consolatory, with a debt of £19,137 and an annual charge for interest of £2,390, the revenue of £3,000 left only £600 for unforeseen expenses and improvements. Thus, at the peace, this island round itself with little or no trade, little or no disposable revenue, no inducement for the affluent to continue their abode, and no prospect of employment for the poor."

What a tale of woe. Small wonder that the people were depressed and any that could were making their way to the mainland. As often happens in communities when there are major difficulties, a committee was appointed in 1815 to consider in particular the overcrowded state of the market, of which it was said that "humanity cries out against the crush which it is difficult to get out of, and against the lack of shelter for the people who, often arriving wet or heated, remained exposed for whole hours to wind and rain, to the severity of the cold and the heat of the sun."

The committee examined the situation, and came to the conclusion that further taxation was impossible. The alternative was to try and borrow money from the banks. But this entailed the payment of a high rate of interest, which they could not afford, particularly in view of the fact that these interest payments would continue for years and would eventually mean that, although the original sum had been repaid in interest charges, the capital sum would remain as a debt.

Fortunately for the people of Guernsey, they had at that time among their leaders some honest men of keen intellect, who put forward the revolutionary suggestion that the States should take advantage of their ancient prerogative and produce their own notes to finance the rebuilding of the market. At first this proposal was turned down. But later in the same year the proposal to issue State notes was agreed to, for a different purpose. The finance committee reported that £5,000 was wanted for roads and a monument to the late Governor, while they had only £1,000 in hand. It was agreed that the remaining £4,000 should be raised by the issue of State £1 notes, 1,500 of which should be payable in April 1817, 1,250 in October the same year, and 1,250 in April 1818. "In this manner" they said, "WITHOUT INCREASING THE DEBT OF THE STATES, we can easily succeed in finishing the works undertaken, leaving moreover in the coffers sufficient money for the other needs of the States."

A SUCCESSFUL VENTURE.

How wise they were is proved by the event. The success of this first creation of State money was so great that it was rapidly followed by others. In June 1819 the question of the market became ever more acute, and it was agreed to finance the rebuilding of it, not in the orthodox manner by raising a loan, but by the State creating the necessary notes "interest free".

The following comment made by the finance committee at a later date shows how successful the venture had become. It was at the time when a further issue of notes was made to diminish the interest-bearing debt to the States. The finance committee declared: "The States could increase the number of notes in circulation without danger

up to 10 000 in payment of the debt and the committee recommends this course as most advantageous to the States' finance, as well as to the public, who, far from making the slightest difficulty in taking them, look for them with eagerness."

And so the story went on. On 29th March 1826 a further issue was authorized to re-build Elizabeth College, which had been founded in 1563 by Queen Elizabeth, and some parochial schools. The Bailiff of that time — Daniel de Lisle Brock — in his address to the States Assembly expressed his belief that the creation of this new money was a great benefit to the States, and caused no inconvenience because of the great care with which it was issued.

Various other creations of new money took place for projects of re-building, widening the streets of St. Peter Port, reconstructing some of its buildings, making new roads and public works of many kinds. The experiments continued over a period of 20 years, by which time the people of Guernsey had developed from a depressed unhappy state to a position of prosperity and happiness. The following brief quotation shows how improved was the situation as a direct result of the wise and statesmanlike action of the Island Parliament. Daniel de Lisle Brock, to whom, it seems, much of the credit must go, said in 1827:

"To bring about the improvements which are the admiration of visitors and which contribute so much to the joy, the health and well-being of the inhabitants, the States have been obliged to issue notes amounting to £55,000. If it had been necessary and if it were still necessary, to pay interest on this sum, it would be so much taken from the fund earmarked to pay for the improvements made and to carry out new ones.

To talk of joy, health and well-being is a very different story from the position in 1815, when it was little or no trade, little or no disposable revenue, and no prospect of employment for the poor." But this happy state of affairs was not to the liking of everyone, and opposition to the idea of the Island States creating their own "debt-free" money had been growing over the years, particularly among the banking interests on the island. A new bank, called the Commercial Bank, was founded in 1830. This institution, together with the old bank, failing to prevent the growing prosperity of the islanders, began to issue notes at its own discretion, flooding the island with paper money.

Reference has already been made to the care exercised in deciding the quantity of money to be issued by the States, and now Daniel de Lisle Brock sought to restrain the private banks from this anti-social activity.

There remains on record his spirited speech to the States meeting held in September 1836 on this subject, and the following two extracts are of particular interest:

"No one has a right to arrogate to himself the power of circulating a private coinage on which he imprints for his own profit an arbitrary value.

"With these facts before our eyes we must realise the necessity of limiting the issue of paper money to the needs and customs, and the benefit, of the community in general. Permission cannot be granted to certain individuals to play with the wealth and prosperity of society."

In spite of all, however, the banks finally won the day. Despite a careful search of the records, no explanation of what actually happened can be found — merely an exchange of letters between representatives of the banks and the Bailiff of the Island. In this, the former suggested that the States should cease to make further issue, should withdraw £1,500 from circulation, and have no more than £40,000 in circulation. To this proposal the Bailiff agreed. Having read the account of his fighting speech to the States, it is difficult to understand what combination of forces caused him to give way. But at least it can be said that the inhabitants of the island benefited materially from the monetary experiment which took place, when the island Parliament created its own money — 'interest free' over 150 years ago.

POSTSCRIPT.

Although the original experiment came to an abrupt end in 1836, there was a further development in 1914, just after the outbreak of the first world war. The demand for an increase in the supply of money was then so great that the Royal Court passed an Ordinance making State notes and those issued by the Banks legal tender. But the Banks were prohibited from increasing their note issue, and all additional notes were issued by the States.

There was a great demand for these States notes, and they first had to be printed locally by two firms in the island: the Star Company and the Guernsey Press Company, who were able to provide what proved to be very serviceable five shilling and ten shilling notes. These were later replaced by notes printed on proper bank-note paper with the customary watermark. The local banks have now been absorbed by the Big Five, so that there is no other local note issue, other than that of States notes which circulate alongside the more familiar Bank of England notes.

Readers who would be interested to follow up the ideas contained in this pamphlet are recommended the following publications:

Inflation — is there a cure? by Edward Holloway.

Expansion or Explosion by Antony Vickers. The Bodley Head.

Economic Tribulation by Vincent Vickers (one time Director of the Bank of England). The Bodley Head.

Great Britain & World Trade edited by Edward Holloway.

All the above are obtainable from the Economic Reform
Club & Institute 2a Queen's Parade London N 10