Editorial

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Earlier this year The Economist ran a special section on corporate social responsibility (22 January 2005). Running over several pages, the gist of this section was that corporate social responsibility ‘has distilled a widespread suspicion of capitalism into a set of demands for action’, confusing proponents of CSR with the anti-capitalist movement around the world. The Economist also confused corporate social responsibility with corporate philanthropy, and, while recognising that CSR comes in a variety of forms, the magazine argued that it is ‘invariably, and dangerously, underpinned by mixed up economics’. Wrong-headed as The Economist position clearly was, the section concluded with the rather tired view that ‘The proper business of business is business. No apology required.’

As readers of, and contributors to, this journal know very well, corporate citizenship, corporate social responsibility and sustainability form very large umbrellas under which many activities and initiatives are covered, and more than most we know full well that there continue to be, and will remain, opponents of the work that we are all engaged in. Opposition is not the problem. Ill-thought opposition is. To that end I have included in this particular issue a very challenging (and perhaps to many in this field a somewhat objectionable) position paper by Walter Block and William Barnett. The paper argues for an approach to capitalism, that, in many respects, stands dramatically counter to the theories and practices of corporate citizenship. I make no apologies for including this article given that we need, as people engaged in this field, to be able to clearly articulate our own positions. Very often one of the best ways of doing that is to engage with what we might see as ‘the opposition’.

To assist in that critical engagement I specifically invited four commentators (Jonathan Batten, Peter Szilagyi, Colin Higgins and Jan Jonker) to write short pieces exploring the issues that Block and Barnett raise. They engage with that article, not so much as a destruction of its
ideas but as a means of thinking through those ideas, many of which are current (and some more dominant than others), through a corporate citizenship filter, in order to more fully debate what many of us might find a limited, non-social, view of capitalism.

I have also been concerned to continue the well-established tradition of this journal by including papers that cover a broad range of interests, which have been, and continue to be, well represented by the contributors and readers of this journal: most particularly on stakeholder engagement (Ann Svendsen and Myriam Laberge), social contract (Sandra Waddock), reputation (Thomas Hemphill), governance (Franklin Stier) and multinational corporations’ responsibilities (Florian Wettstein), but also to broaden our field of interest a little more by including papers presenting ideas and issues emerging from Eastern (Edwina Pio) and Western philosophies (Lindsay Dawson).

As Patricia Peter, from the Institute of Directors (London), made clear in a letter to *The Economist* (5 February 2005), responding to the corporate social responsibility section,

the challenge now is to generate a new climate, where business considers what the right elements to pursue under the heading of ‘Good Management’ are. If that cannot be achieved, more regulation will inevitably move the equation inexorably from good management, within the control of business, to pernicious and delusional CSR.

None of us is interested in pernicious and delusional CSR, and perhaps a good number of us would not wish to see corporate citizenship controlled and contained within strict regulatory and legislative frameworks, and so it is incumbent on us to be able to mount effective, articulate and persuasive arguments for the value of the field we work in. I am confident that the papers included in this issue do just that.

*David Birch,*  
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