

Susan George: TNI biography (2 pages)

(<http://www.tni.org/susangeorge>)

NB: This biography is current to the end of November 2008. Please do not use wikipedia or any other source for bio and photos.

For those introducing me at speeches and other events: the first paragraph here is more than adequate. I include further details for the sake of completeness.

PLEASE AVOID the following common errors: I am not an "economist" and have no formal degree in this area. If you need an academic category, "political scientist" or "political economist" is close enough. PLEASE DO NOT refer to the Observatoire de la Mondialisation (Globalisation Observatory) which has ceased to exist. Usually English-speaking people spell my name correctly, but sometimes they gallicise it: GEORGE does not take an "S". Thank you, SG.



SUSAN GEORGE is the author of fourteen books written in French and English and widely translated. She is president of the Board of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, a decentralised fellowship of scholars living throughout the world whose work is intended to contribute to social justice and who are active in civil society in their own countries. She is also honorary president of ATTAC-France [Association for Taxation of Financial Transaction to Aid Citizens] where she also served as vice-president between 1999 and mid-2006 and remains a member of the scientific council. Her most recent books are [1] [Hijacking America: How the Religious and Secular Right Changed What Americans Think](#)

[Polity Press 2008] which exists in [French](#), [Spanish](#) and Italian and will soon appear in Korean, Japanese and Brazilian Portuguese; [2] [We the Peoples of Europe](#) [Pluto Press 2008], also in French, [Nous, Peuples d'Europe](#) [Fayard, Paris 2005] and [Spanish](#). Other recent books are [Another World is Possible if...](#) [Verso, New York and London, 2004] and [The Lugano Report: On preserving capitalism in the 21st century](#) [Pluto Press 1999], both available in many other languages. Her well-known first book [How the Other Half Dies: the Real Reasons for World Hunger](#) is now available on her TNI homepage. She has received honorary doctorates from the [University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne](#) and the [Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia](#) of Madrid as well as the first "Outstanding Public Scholar Award" of the International Political Economy section of the International Studies Association.

Susan George's academic degrees are in French/Government [B.A. Smith College, USA]; Philosophy [Licence ès Philosophie, Sorbonne] and Political Studies [Doctorate, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, University of Paris]. Her current work concerns various aspects of neoliberal globalisation and ideology. She helped to lead the campaign in France to defeat the Multilateral Agreement on

Investment (MAI) and the subsequent movement of "GATS-Free Zones" to which over 1500 local governments in Europe now belong. Her recent work on the future of Europe and the ideological transformation of the United States has led to many speaking engagements and media appearances.

Earlier books include [Faith and Credit: the World Bank's Secular Empire](#) (with Fabrizio Sabelli, Penguin, 1994); [The Debt Boomerang](#) (Pluto Press, 1992); [Ill Fares the Land](#) (Penguin, 1990); [A Fate Worse than Debt](#) (Penguin 1987); [Food for Beginners](#) (Writers and Readers, 1983); [How the Other Half Dies: the Real Reasons for World Hunger](#) (Penguin 1976). Books in French are [Pour ou Contre la Mondialisation Libérale](#) (a debate with Martin Wolf of the Financial Times, Editions Grasset, Paris 2002); [Remettre l'OMC à sa Place](#) (Editions Mille et Une Nuits, Paris 2001); [La Suisse aux Enchères](#) (with Fabrizio Sabelli, Editions Zoé, Geneva 1997) and [Les Stratèges de la Faim](#) (Editions Grounauer, Geneva 1982, her doctoral dissertation). Susan George is the author of dozens of prefaces, journal and magazine articles, conference and seminar contributions, chapters in edited volumes, etc. Some of these can be consulted on her TNI web page. Her work has been widely translated; part or all exists in French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, four Scandinavian languages, Estonian, Japanese, Korean, Bengali, Thai, etc.

From 1990-95 she served on the Board of Greenpeace International as well as that of Greenpeace France. She has acted as a consultant to various United Nations specialised agencies and is a frequent public speaker, particularly for ATTAC groups, trade unions and environment/development Non-Governmental Organisations in many countries. She is frequently interviewed for press, radio and television.

Susan George was born in the United States, lives in Paris and is a French citizen. She was widowed in 2002, has three children and four grand-children.

Susan George: Long biography

This is a longer biography that appeared in Current Biography (2007), © The H. W. Wilson Company, Volume 68 Number 7, July 2007, pp. 34-40.

SUSAN GEORGE (June 29, 1934-) Social scientist; activist; writer

When the political scientist Susan George accepted an honorary doctorate from the Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia, in Madrid, Spain, on April 25, 2007, she was characteristically forthright about her disdain for the political establishment, saying, as quoted on the Transnational Institute (TNI) Web site, "I believe that the forces of wealth, power and control are invariably at the root of any problem of social and political economy. The job of the responsible social scientist is first to uncover these forces, second to write about them clearly, without jargon, in order to give ordinary people the right tools for action; and finally--recognising that scholarly neutrality is an illusion--to take an advocacy position in favour of the disadvantaged, the underdogs, the victims of injustice. This is what I think the tools of scholarship are for and this is how I have tried in my own work to use them."

Throughout her career, George has been a strident antiwar activist as well as a powerful voice against acts of corporate greed. At a time when women were not often allowed places of power in any organizational hierarchy, George established herself as a leader in the antihunger movement and legitimized her scholarship in the eyes of skeptics by obtaining an advanced degree from the Sorbonne as well as a doctorate from the University of Paris, in her adopted country of France. The author of 10 books, including *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger*, *Ill Fares the Land*, and *The Debt Boomerang*, George is regarded as a preeminent political and economic thinker and activist for human rights.

George was born Susan Vance Akers on June 29, 1934 in Akron, Ohio. She was the only child of Edith and Walter Akers, Episcopalians whose families had been in America for many generations; George's ancestors arrived in Massachusetts in 1632. George's father was an insurance broker, and her mother was a homemaker and a member of the Junior League.

Though born during the Great Depression, George was raised in a privileged environment; she had a nursemaid and took dance classes, music lessons, and, at a YMCA, swimming lessons. After attending a public, co-educational primary school, she went on to enroll at all-girls private preparatory academy. She told *Current Biography* that single-sex schooling "made me not a feminist. It was normal that women do whatever anybody did. Women were the sports experts. Women were the brains. You weren't in competition with men. You weren't expected to shut up--on the contrary! Even in my era, I never felt that I was particularly put down as a woman ever." George's father encouraged all her interests, including those outside the realm of traditional femininity, such as science and baseball. When Walter Akers went to serve in World War II, his daughter assisted in planting a victory garden.

As a young student, George was a voracious reader and always ranked first in her class. Around the age of 12, she began to develop a strong passion for the culture,

language, and people of France. As a teenager she chose to attend Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts, specifically in order to participate in the junior-year-abroad program in France. In Paris during the 1954-55 academic year, she took courses at Sciences Po, a school specializing in social sciences. During that time, at the age of 20, she met a successful French lawyer, Charles-Henry George. In 1956, after obtaining her B.A. degree in government studies and French, she married George, 12 years her senior; she made France her permanent residence that year, but she did not obtain French citizenship until 1994. She told Current Biography that in her early years in France she felt homesick "for my women friends, probably, but not for America, per se. I'd made my choice." The couple soon started a family. Once her three children were in school full-time, George attended the Sorbonne, obtaining the French equivalent of a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1967.

George became a political activist in response to France's war in Algeria and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. She told Current Biography, "Vietnam broke my loyal little still-American heart. The atrocities, the [U.S.] government's lies, the betrayal of the country's ideals, all this cried out for justice." In 1967 George joined the Paris-American Committee to Stop War. In 1969 she became the assistant to the director of a nongovernmental organization (NGO), the American Centre for Students and Artists, for which she frequently organized antiwar events. (Her activities did not escape the attention of the FBI or the CIA; years later, taking advantage of the Freedom of Information Act, she discovered hundreds of pages of information about herself that had been obtained through surveillance.)

George told Current Biography that the Vietnam War "was this sort of gateway to understanding what America could be, which is to say something quite negative, which I had not understood at all when I lived there. I had accepted the usual propaganda." In 1971 she began working with the Front Solidarite Indochine, a group that organized antiwar lectures and protests in France. Her participation in their activities forced her to overcome her fear of public speaking. She also began volunteering as a translator for American, Cambodian, and Laotian antiwar activists. When the Paris-American Committee to Stop War was forcibly dismantled by the French government (which, according to George, acted at the request of the U.S. government), George collaborated with the directors of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., to form a new NGO devoted to social justice--the Transnational Institute, which opened its doors in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 1973. George remains a fellow at TNI and also serves as its board chair.

After the Chilean president Salvador Allende was overthrown in a U.S.-backed coup in September 1973, George helped Chilean political refugees to settle in France. In 1974 she enrolled in a doctoral program in political science at the School of Higher Social Science Studies at the University of Paris, completing her degree in 1978 and receiving highest honors. Meanwhile, in 1974 she traveled to the World Food Conference in Rome, Italy, where she was enraged by the corporate agribusiness representatives who dominated the proceedings. The World Food Conference was organized by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an agency designed to lead international efforts against famine and malnutrition; the two largest delegations at the conference were those of the United States and the agriculture industry. George felt that the FAO gave too much power to transnational agribusiness corporations. She told Current Biography, "This event was a turning point for me. . . .

I was incensed at the level of official cant and the politics played with millions of hungry people's lives." She added that at the conference, "no one who counted took the real reasons for hunger--power and control in the wrong hands--into account."

In 1976 Penguin published George's first book, *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger*. According to the Web site of the Transnational Institute, "Hunger is not a scourge but a scandal. This is the premise of Susan George's classic study of world hunger. Contrary to popular opinion, malnutrition and starvation are not the result of over-population, of poor climate or lack of cultivatable land. The reason why hunger exists on such a vast scale is because world food supplies are controlled by the rich and powerful for the wealthy consumer. . . . Working with local elites, protected by the powerful West, the United States paves the way and is gradually imposing its control over the whole planet. . . . The book's relevance, its ability to shock and its power to enrage have in no measure [diminished]." George told *Current Biography* that the book "launched" her when she was 42. "Everyone has the right to one enormous stroke of luck in life and this was mine. I've never looked back." *How the Other Half Dies* was a critical and financial success. William Diebold Jr. wrote for *Foreign Affairs* (January 1978) that the book was "a lively analysis. . . . The prescription is for change."

Thirty years after the book was published, George remained deeply concerned with issues of famine and food distribution. She attended the Table of Free Voices conference, held in Berlin, Germany, in September 2006 and organized by Dropping Knowledge, a German nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion of international dialogue, art, and culture; as quoted on the TNI Web site, she said at the conference, "We . . . produce enough food for everyone, but most of this production is in places where people are not going hungry; and where people are going hungry, very often their farmers have been ruined by cheap imports coming from the rich countries. This has happened massively in Mexico. So, there are many more poor Mexicans than there were and many have lost their farms and these people cannot compete. Thai rice farmers have lost their land; Filipino rice farmers have lost their land."

George published her 1978 doctoral dissertation, *Les Strategies de la faim* (*Strategists of Hunger*), in Switzerland in 1982. In the following year she published *Food for Beginners*, illustrated by Nigel Paige. She played an active role in organizing the World Food Assembly, a meeting held in Rome, Italy, in 1984 for the purpose of fighting famine and seeking social justice and composed of representatives of nongovernmental organizations from the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. George's book *A Fate Worse than Debt* appeared in 1987. In her address to the executive committee of the World Alliance of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Geneva, Switzerland, on June 19, 1999, George said about her reasons for writing the book, "We identified the fact that debt [owed to wealthy lending nations by poor countries] was the biggest new contributing factor to world hunger. That is why, having worked on world hunger and with a lot of NGOs, I got involved in studying debt. I tried to make a clear explanation of how it was contributing to economic injustice, and the very real effects on human beings: hunger, misery, a much worse life for women in particular, increased crime, riots, conflict, ecological destruction. Debt was involved in all of these issues." In "Rethinking Debt," a paper presented at the nongovernmental organization (NGO) conference North-South

Roundtable on Moving Africa into the 21st Century, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in October 1995, George wrote, "Debt lies at the nexus of a strategic, worldwide reconfiguration of power. . . . It has accelerated transfers of wealth from the poor to the rich both within and between countries. . . . It has downgraded and diminished the importance of the State and the ability of governments to govern; as well as the overall influence and negotiating capacity of the 'third world.' . . . The creditors may not be open to moral arguments, but if Africans speak with one voice, they may, perhaps, convince them that their interest lies in severing the debt noose." At the time of the book's publication, as George told the executive committee of the World Alliance of the YMCA, further explaining her impetus for writing it, "there were . . . a good many campaigns and lots of NGOs . . . interested in this issue, but it was clear that we weren't getting any involvement from the top people, from either governments, or the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund."

In 1990 George published *Ill Fares the Land*. From that year until 1995, she served on the board of the environmental conservation group Greenpeace International and of Greenpeace France. She particularly admired the organization's ability to mobilize its many regional branches to focus on protesting one major issue at a time. In an interview with Caspar Henderson for the Web site OpenDemocracy.org (October 13, 2004), George said, "Greenpeace was quite successful with such campaigns. All its offices across the world would suspend their particular activities and join together."

The *Debt Boomerang*, George's 1992 volume, continued her analysis of the inequalities between the wealthier nations of the Northern Hemisphere and the poorer countries of the Southern Hemisphere. She told the executive committee of the World Alliance of the YMCA that she wrote the book "with the idea that if the suffering in the South was not enough to move the powers, perhaps it would help if it was explained that the debt was not just a problem for the South, but that in fact it was a boomerang and it was coming back and affecting the rich countries in a great many ways." In *Faith and Credit: the World Bank's Secular Empire* (1994), which she wrote with the anthropologist Fabrizio Sabelli, George expounded her beliefs regarding the negative impact of the World Bank on the worldwide poverty and hunger crisis. The World Bank, founded in July 1944 at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, consists of five organizations responsible for providing funds and advice to countries in order to promote economic development and eliminate poverty. Supporters of the organization argue that the World Bank conducts ethical and transparent business with countries in need of help. Critics, including George, contend that the World Bank is a corrupt institution that provides insufficient assistance to poorer countries. According to the Bretton Woods Project Web site, "With the World Bank, there are concerns about the types of development projects funded . . . Many infrastructural projects financed by the World Bank Group have social and environmental implications for the populations in the affected areas and criticism has centred around the ethical issues of funding such projects. For example, World Bank-funded construction of hydroelectric dams in various countries have resulted in the displacement of indigenous peoples of the area. There are also concerns that the World Bank working in partnership with the private sector may undermine the role of the state as the primary provider of essential goods and services, such as healthcare and education, resulting in the shortfall of such services in countries badly in need of them." George said at the Table of Free Voices conference, "Our wealth does not depend on the Third World being poor, but we have

organized everything in the North so that the Third World does remain poor. If the Third World were less poor, we would be selling them more, and we would in fact be richer."

La Suisse aux enchères (whose title translates roughly as "Switzerland Auctioned Off"), another collaboration with Sabelli, appeared in Switzerland in 1997. Two years later George published *The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the 21st Century*. The book is a fictional report issued by a group of imaginary pro-capitalist, pro-globalization experts who raise the question of how to preserve capitalism forever. George explained at the Table of Free Voices conference that the book contains a scenario in which "I imagine that there is a report to be directed to Master of the Universe types who are asking pretty much that kind of question. How can we continue with this economic system without having total collapse? What must we do to make this continue to work? And the answer which is given unfortunately by this group of experts which I have invented . . . is, well, you cannot do it with eight billion people on earth as there are going to be in 2020. That's tomorrow in historical terms. So, the long emergency has already started. And, if we try to manage the world as we are doing now with eight billion people on earth, everything is going to collapse."

From 1999 to 2006 George served as vice president of the Association for Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens (ATTAC France). During that period she also participated in the Helsinki Process, which she described to *Current Biography* as "a group established by the governments of Finland and Tanzania, with many other governments now acting as 'Friends' of the Process, trying to deal with the problems of globalization." She grew increasingly critical of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the weeks before its 1999 meeting in Seattle, Washington. The World Trade Organization is responsible for negotiating and implementing new international trade agreements as well as enforcing member countries' adherence to those agreements. Its governing body, the Ministerial Conference, meets every two years. The WTO's advocates argue that the organization is an important intermediary between countries and is a positive force for financial growth in all nations. Detractors such as George argue that the WTO is biased in favor of wealthy countries and multinational corporations and that it harms smaller, less powerful countries. Critics see the WTO as a major force for globalization, the process by which corporations are allowed increasing flexibility with regard to global expansion as well as financial, environmental, and labor practices. The Seattle meeting of the Ministerial Conference of the WTO was disrupted by mass protests on the part of antiglobalization groups. George wrote for the *London Guardian* (November 24, 1999), "Without warning, the WTO has created an international court of 'justice' that is making law and establishing case law in which existing national laws are all 'barriers' to trade, and is sweeping aside all environmental, social or public health concerns." George wrote for *Le Monde diplomatique* (January 2000), "The civic movement's success in Seattle is a mystery only to those who had no part in it. . . . Trade must have no place in areas such as health, education and culture in the broadest sense of the term." George published *Remettre l'OMC à sa Place* (Put the WTO in Its Place) in 2001 and, the next year, *Pour ou Contre la Mondialisation Libérale*, consisting of a debate with Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times*.

Offering a critical take on George's work, Mark O'Brien wrote for *International Socialism* (Spring 2000), "The weakness of George's analysis of the economic roots

of the crisis of world capitalism leads directly to an uncertainty as to who her audience actually is. Often her writings read as an appeal to opinion formers and practitioners within government or development circles. . . . Her proposals border on an almost utopian belief in the humanitarian good sense of some elements within capitalist governments. . . . There is no sense in George's writings of the revolutionary potential of the working classes of the Third World and of the West."

George's book *Another World Is Possible If . . .* came out in 2004. She told Henderson, "This is at the heart of my book's argument--that Europeans must lead the world. My experience is that there are many people outside the movement who sense that there are a lot of things wrong with the world, but who are hesitant or unclear about what they are able to do. Here, my central argument is that, faced with an America that is going to be immovable . . . Europe has to lead the change. . . . So my plea to Europeans is to recognize who they are, what their achievements have been for the interests of the poor and working people over the last hundred years and say that a welfare model is possible for the entire world--and that it's up to us in Europe to make that happen."

In 2004 George half-heartedly supported the candidacy of U.S. senator John Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, for president. While she had canvassed for Kerry in Pennsylvania, she wrote for *OpenDemocracy.org* (November 3, 2004), "we all thought [Kerry] had a very good chance, even though everyone admitted it was hard to get really enthusiastic about him. . . . The man isn't the most charismatic ever to walk the earth. But at least he's not a proto-fascist or a go-it-aloner, and that's what we seem--apart from a last-minute miracle--to be stuck with now. With four years clear ahead of him and no re-election to worry about, I fear Bush and the ghastly neo-con/neo-liberals around him will now go on the rampage. They can continue with impunity their attacks on the Constitution and on hard-won freedoms; while profound economic inequalities and religious obscurantism spread throughout the country."

George published *Nou, Peuples d'Europe* (*We, the Peoples of Europe*) in 2005. She received an honorary doctorate in civil law from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in January 2007, and in March of that year, the International Studies Association presented her with its first award for Outstanding Public Scholar at its congress in Chicago, Illinois. Also in 2007 she received an honorary doctorate in political science and sociology from the Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia, in Madrid. As of May 2007 George had written and was awaiting the publication of "Culture in Chains: How the Religious and Secular Right Captured America." Publishers in Spain, Brazil, and France swiftly acquired the book. Her work has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, four Scandinavian languages, Estonian, Japanese, Korean, Bengali, and Thai.

In 2002 George's husband, Charles-Henry George, died at their country home in France. She has three adult children--Valerie, Michel, and Stephanie--and is a grandmother. George told *Current Biography*, "Either we achieve together a new level of human emancipation, and do so in a way that preserves the earth, or we shall leave behind us the worst future for our children that capitalism and nature can deal them. No one knows in which direction the balance will tip nor does anyone know which actions, which writings, which alliances may achieve the critical mass that leads us one way or another, backwards or forwards. I am acutely conscious of the

precariousness of our moment and my four much-loved grandchildren give me added resolve to address it."

Suggested Reading: (London) Guardian (on-line) Nov. 24, 1999;
OpenDemocracy.org; Transnational Institute Wet site

Selected Books: How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger, 1976; Les Strategies de la Faim, 1982; Food for Beginners, 1983; A Fate Worse than Debt, 1987; Ill Fares the Land, 1990; The Debt Boomerang, 1992; Faith and Credit: the World Bank's Secular Empire, 1994; La Suisse aux Encheres, 1997; The Lugano Report: On Preserving Capitalism in the 21st Century, 1999; Remettre l'OMC a sa, 2001; Another World Is Possible If . . . , 2004; Nou, Peuples d'Europe, 2005