

The Land Issue

by
William Shepherd

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Henry & Halford

Henry George has been dead almost a hundred years and his classic work *Progress and Poverty* has been available since 1879. The problem, he said, was land. Solve that and you are half way there. His solution was the solution that the Enlightenment philosophers had come up with a century before. Start with natural rights, deduce from this that you and I suffer a loss when the earth, the air, the fire or the water is taken from us, and then propose we get paid interest to cover our loss.

Henry George cloaked all this medieval thinking in fine English prose, updated it for American pioneer conditions, dropped off the air, fire and water, and swayed many great minds into believing that a Land Tax would herald the dawning of a new age. Right problem, Henry, but quite the wrong solution.

Leopold Kohr has been around for eighty years and his classic book *The Breakdown of Nations* has been available since 1949. The problem, he said, was size. Solve that and you are well on your way. His solution was the solution that Sir Halford Mackinder had come up with while a director of the *London School of Economics* from 1903 to 1908. His key ideas were brought together in 1919 in his pamphlet *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.

Leopold Kohr would have picked them up through the writings of the *Haushofer School of Geopolitics* and, being a natural a scholar, would have traced this school's thoughts back to its roots and discovered that it had read only the chapter on the *Landsman's Point of View*, overlooked the implications of the chapter on the *Seaman's Point of View*, and completely missed the origin of the *Fourth World's* geopolitical ideas in his two chapters on the *Freedom of Nations* and the *Freedom of Men*.

John Papworth studied at the LSE after the second world war when we were all given a second chance to put Mackinder's *Fourth World* solution into effect and *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was once again in vogue. Now the Third World War (Nixon's term) has come to an end and Europe is breaking down once again into its constituent pieces, we are being given yet another chance. Third time lucky? Right problem, Halford. And right solution too.

Now the point of these two brief histories is to emphasis that no decent idea is ever a new idea, but will always have a history. Moreover, ideas are only accepted into our history books by way of their impact on the world. History is past politics and politics is future history. Mackinder's *Heartland* ideas are in the history book because Hitler's Nazi ideology abused them.

Fabian Papers

But though an idea might not have an impact, it need not be without influence. It was *Progress and Poverty* that got Bernard Shaw thinking, and it was Shaw who got everybody else thinking with the publication of *The Fabian Papers* ten years later. Indeed, if any more evidence is needed of the power of ideas to develop their own momentum, then a cursory reading of R.H.Tawney's 1921 book *The Acquisitive Society* should be more than enough to show that *British Socialism* had already taken on board Henry George by the end of the War when R.H.Tawney was calling for industry to become a profession, an idea that the *British Labour* movement would do well to take note of, as Thatcherism is allowed to get away with trying to turn the professions into industries.

As for the Fourth World's position in all this, Sir Halford Mackinder put his finger on it. The real threat to organisation by locality is organisation by interests. If there is one message that has to come across to the *Green Party* from the *Fourth World* it is this.

But if the whole issue comes down to locality and to rooted, balanced communities developing their own local patterns of *The Good Life* in a nation which is a confederation of *Village Regions*, then have not all these intellectuals who have taken on board Henry George's ideas and fed them into the grand edifice of intellectual sophistry upon which our *Fourth World* ideas are based been guilty of overcomplicating matters? Could it be that Henry George himself stands accused of setting in motion the whole exercise by failing to see the wood for the trees?

Tudor Times

There are now more sheep in Britain than there have ever been since records began. Census figures show that 43 million of them are swarming the hillsides. That's almost as many sheep as people. Walking in the countryside is by far the most popular recreation in Britain with over ten million people of all ages and abilities taking part regularly. People in England and Wales took 350 million 'trips' into the countryside in 1987. The corresponding figure for all organised sports was 140 million 'trips'. Seven million people are actively involved in angling. Allotments are five times as productive as a well-run farm.

¹ *The Land Issue* was first published in *Fourth World Review* No.38 in September 1990 under the title *Real Questions on Land*.

Farmers under pressure to cut down on milk production have turned to sheep farming. Two-thirds of the fifty million kilos of wool is exported. You can find it in Japanese futons and Italian mattresses. Lambs sell for £60 for breeding and £30 for slaughter. Government-guaranteed minimum price for wool of 129p per kilo is being abolished. And so it goes on.

Perhaps it is time we started asking some real questions about our land. Like what the devil is it being used for? Like where did all the commons go? Like who is giving who the right to privatise the countryside? Like who knocked down all our cottages and built walls out of them? Like why can I only claim an allotment when my forefathers could claim two acres and a pig? Like why can he walk there and not me?

Instead of ignoring Henry George, we should instead take up his cudgel. Yes, damn it, you're right. It is the land. By George. I think you've got it! Now get out of our way. Stop confusing everybody with your silly numbers. R.H.Tawney was nearer the mark. He takes us back to the England of the Tudors and the France of Henry IV when it was considered a mark of statesmanship to cherish the small property owner even to the point of offending the great. Here is R.H.Tawney in *The Acquisitive Society*.

'Popular sentiment idealised the yeoman - "the Joseph of the country who keeps the poor from starving" - not merely because he owned property, but because he worked on it.

It denounced that "bringing of the livings of many into the hands of one", which capitalist societies regard with equanimity as an inevitable, and apparently, a laudable result of economic development; cursed the usurer who took advantage of his neighbour's necessities to live without labour; and was shocked by the callous indifference to the public welfare shown by those who "not having before their eyes either God or the profit and advantage of the realm, have enclosed with hedges and dykes towns and hamlets".

And it was sufficiently powerful to compel Governments to intervene to prevent the laying of field to field, and the engrossing of looms - to set limits in short, to the scale to which property might grow.'

Purpose & Meaning

Nobody should make the mistake of thinking that Kohr, George, Papworth, Tawney, Bacon, Mackinder or Shaw cared a tuppence for any ideas that the owning of property endowed the unhappy recipient with wealth, or that labelling the owner as 'public' necessarily made a ha'pence of difference. They were much too wise and much too familiar with property, wealth and ownership for that.

With regards to land...as with anything that can tolerate the name 'property'...it comes down to constitution making. And, as every wise man has argued, this has to start with the question of purpose. And from there you naturally progress towards the notion of duties rather than rights - and mutual ones at that. No power without responsibility. There really is no such thing as a new idea.

And lest, as one without property only too conscious of your poverty, you still doubt the truth of these remarks, let me quote you something, not from a saint (for St Francis of Assisi will serve us well enough) but from the conversation of *Piscator* and *Venator* as they walked back to Tottenham-Cross after a few days of successful fishing up near Ware.

'But Master, first let me tell you that, that very hour which you were absent from me, I sate down under a willow-tree by the water-side, and considered what you had told me of the Owner of that pleasant meadow in which you then left me; that he had a plentiful estate, and not a heart to think so; that he had at this time law-suits depending, and that they both damp'd his mirth, and took up so much of his time and thoughts, that he himself had not leisure to take the sweet content that I (who pretended no title to them) took to the fields.

And as I thus sate, joying in my own happy condition, and pitying that poor rich man, that owned this and many other pleasant Groves and Meadows about me, I did thankfully remember what my Saviour said, that the meek possess the Earth; or rather, they enjoy what the others possess and enjoy not, for Anglers and meek quiet-spirited-men, are free from those high, those restless thoughts which corrode the sweets of life.'

From Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* of course. And with the privatising of our country's rivers and water courses, a closer scrutiny of our traditional common laws regarding such 'property' would not go amiss. In fact, what better last word could we wish for, but that most enduring of Fourth World sentiments expressed by no lesser a personage than Francis Bacon, who wrote when commending Henry VII for protecting the tenant right of the small farmer and pleading in the House of Commons for more drastic land legislation:

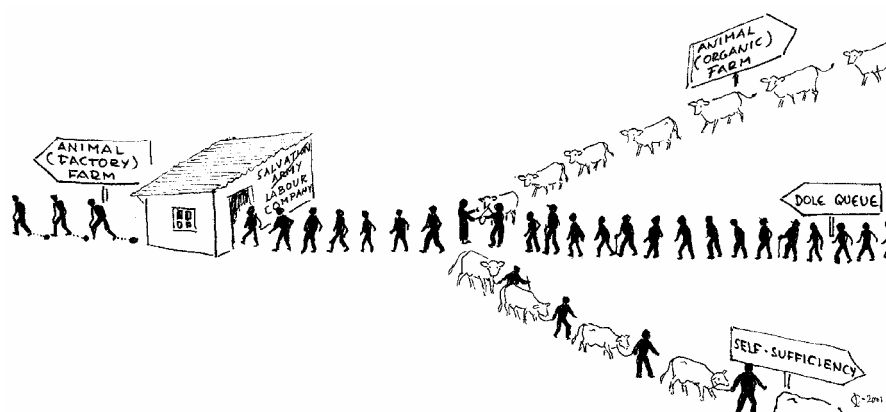
'Wealth is like muck. It is not good but it be spread.'

Further Reading © William Shepherd 2008

1. *Nation of Gardeners*: Public Purpose; Country Gardens; Master Gardeners; Farms for People; Five Acres & A Cow.



2. *England's Landed Property*: Introduction; The Paine Plan; Landed Property; Money Wars; The Local Front



3. *The Wealth of Counties*. In 1795 Tom Paine wrote a short book entitled *Agrarian Justice* which provides a grounding in his *Economic Arithmetic*. This paper takes a long view on the *County of Kent...the Garden of England...* by looking at it from a 'painian' perspective. Any county with the foresight to introduce ecological sanity by way of *Agenda 21* could take a similar approach to economic sanity...without waiting for a *Rio Summit* to give them permission. The English counties need a calculus to assess their monetary needs. Here is one way to go about the task.

4. *Five Acres & A Cow: in Praise of the Peasant Economy*: a research report prepared on behalf of the *Cliff's Edge Signalling Company (cesc)*; Contents: Introduction; 1. Cow Worship; 2. Cow Ardly?; 3. Cow Buying; 4. Cow Lessons; 5. Cow Work; 6. Cow Costs; 7. Cow Products; 8. Cow Trading; 9. Cow Profits; 10. Cow (Im)pacts.

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| 1. Nation of Gardeners | http://www.cesc.net/adobeweb/scholars/shepherd/nationofgardeners.pdf |
| 2. Landed Property | http://www.cesc.net/adobeweb/scholars/shepherd/landedproperty.pdf |
| 3. Wealth of Counties | http://www.cesc.net/adobeweb/scholars/shepherd/countywealth.pdf |
| 4. Five Acres & A Cow | http://www.cesc.net/adobeweb/scholars/shepherd/fiveacres&acow.pdf |

About the Author

William Shepherd is an English radical economist living in Rye, Sussex. Born at the end of the Hitler War, he is a regular contributor to *Fourth World Review* and the author of *The Rise & Fall of the Swedish Green Party (1982-1997)* published in 1989. He manages *Academic Inn Books* and the *Cliff Edge Signalling Company (cesc)*. His two grown-up children are bilingual in English and Swedish. [2001]

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| 6. Bibliography | http://cesc.net/adobeweb/scholars/shepherd/fwrbibliography.pdf |
| 7. Chronicles | http://williamshepherd.blog.co.uk/ |

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| 10. williamfranklin | http://williamfranklin.com |

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