Surfing Your High Hopes
Population still keeps on increasing, giving greater and greater utility to the land...
On her appointment as Prime Minister, Mrs May recognised how the ‘Brexit’ referendum result highlighted the problem that confronts a very large number of working households throughout the UK who are only “Just About Managing” (the JAMs).

This concern was reflected in her Lancaster House speech in January and in the new Government’s White Paper entitled “The United Kingdom’s exit from and new partnership with the European Union”. This document identifies key “principles which will guide the Government in fulfilling the democratic will of the people of the UK”. They include providing certainty, establishing free trade, the protection of worker’s rights, control of our own laws and strengthening the Union whilst seeking a “strong new partnership with the EU” and “a more open, outward looking, confident and fairer UK, which works for all”. In her speech, and at the end of her Foreword to the White Paper the Prime Minister said of the Government’s intent “So that when future generations look back at this time, they will judge us not only by the decision that we made, but by what we made of that decision”.

Regular readers of Land&Liberty would endorse that intent but will know how successful implementation of the Government’s declared aspirations will only be possible if they form part of a wider programme of economic reforms aimed at ensuring economic justice for all.

Logically “free trade” is not only about the abolition of tariffs and customs duties that constrain overseas trade but includes the abolition of taxes that inhibit the voluntary exchange of goods and services throughout the UK. Such taxes increase the costs of living, employing, trading and producing for all UK citizens and firms and likewise reduce the rewards they earn for working, producing and serving each other. In particular they hit the JAMs i.e. not only those individual households who are obliged to live and earn their living in locations and occupations that are ‘economically marginal’ but those communities who, because they are located some distance from the Union’s capital and “Prime Locations” suffer more than those close by.

There is now a pressing need and opportunity to re-examine the contributions and roles that individuals, families, firms, communities and their governments at various levels need to play if the production and distribution of real wealth throughout the UK, Europe and the world is to be optimised. Likewise, the roles of land, land value, capital, trade, credit, money, banking and international finance need to be reconsidered in the context of prospects for world peace, environmental sustainability and sustainable economic development.

In this context the merits of economic policies that promote unilateral free trade and land value based fiscal reforms become more obvious. It becomes clear that such measures would increase the earnings of UK producers and reduce their costs and asking prices. These reductions would completely outweigh any increase in price an overseas customer might suffer at the hands of their own government wishing to impose a WTO type import tariff. The issues involved become even clearer when considered in light of the teachings of Henry George and in accordance with the ‘Golden Rule’ that he so extolled i.e. ‘to do unto others as you would have them do to you’.

David Triggs
Chairman
Henry George Foundation
henrygeorgefoundation@googlemail.com
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The Henry George Foundation website now has archives of all Land&Liberty issues since 1894, reproduced in their original form. The archives preserve a remarkable history of the struggle to overcome land monopoly and the consequent poverty - along with the history of constant opposition through ignorance or vested interests. One of the recurring themes is the housing crisis, especially in the inner cities such as Glasgow.

And here we are now, over a hundred years later, still speaking of the housing crisis. The proposed remedies of increased production and wider distribution of wealth have had no effect whatsoever on either the shortage of decent housing or the costs of a home. Indeed, as a proportion of income the costs have increased and now rents or mortgages average 40% of a household income. Declarations of human rights and the right of every human being to a home have had no effect whatsoever.

The Housing White Paper published by the government February 7 is nothing more than a consultation document, and nothing in it suggests a grasp of the real nature of the problem. In a BBC Newsnight interview the Conservative housing minister, Gavin Barwell, was asked: why could not land held out of use by developers be taxed so that they would build on it. He replied that "A land tax would discourage investors". No doubt in all innocence, the minister revealed in that reply the real concern of the Conservative Party: not housing but investment in land monopoly. The investor takes precedence over the countless homeless citizens of our nation - the people that Gavin Barwell was elected to serve. At a stroke his statement converted the housing problem into an entirely different one: how can land speculators continue making vast profits and at the same time provide urgently needed homes? It seems to be a catch-22 situation.

But Gavin Barwell has even more adventurous and deeply ignorant ideas. The Independent newspaper, reporting on the Tory Conference last year, wrote: "Gavin Barwell told the party's conference that the Labour plan to build at least 500,000 council homes as part of an increase overall housebuilding to a million would increase inequality between people who owned homes and those that did not." It is worth thinking what this very odd assertion means. If the poor are given affordable rented homes to live in, this will increase inequality between them and the rich who can buy homes. It is the oddest argument. And surely it could work in reverse, that if the cost of buying homes was substantially reduced, this would produce more equality between home owners and those renting affordable homes. This did not occur to Gavin Barwell. Instead he argues that more social housing would force up the cost of buying homes. Then he says another totally incompressible thing:

"If we carry on building at the current rate then by 2020 the average house in the south east of England will increase by about £1000 a week. That will mean normal people's homes in Kent or Hampshire, or wherever, are going to be earning more than they're earning".

I am not even going to attempt to make sense of that statement - though I wonder who these "normal people" are. It is meant to reinforce his claim that the more social houses are increased, the greater will be the inequality between the rich and the poor. But if the poor have decent homes to live in, they will not be so poor any more. The truth is that, the more people have decent homes to live in, the greater the equality.

I do not think Gavin Barwell means harm. He is not a bad person. Nor is what he says so surprising. Since the 1980s the Thatcher government has fostered the notion that owning a home is not so much about dwelling with your family as about making an investment. So homes are not really homes any more, but commodities to buy and sell at a profit. They are merely market products. This idea is the cause of homelessness. It has fostered pyramid buying and selling, which means that the home owner has been turned into a land speculator, even to the point where the owner's children are priced out of the market.

But Gavin Barwell does not have a monopoly on ignorance. In a newsletter of February 22nd MP Sir Roger Gale writes:

"In an attempt to reform Domestic Rates Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government introduced what was wrongly described but became known as the “Poll Tax”. It seemed at the time fairer and more sensible to charge people individually for the services that they used in a household rather than to base the taxation paid for the emptying of dustbins and the maintenance of roads and schools on the value of an individual property in which, however large, only one person might be living."

It sounds like the 'little old lady' argument again. What is it that creates the value of the individual property? The benefits created by the community. A little terraced house in Chelsea has greater benefits from the wider community than a little terraced house in Liverpool. It is the benefit of the location that creates the difference. It is this that argues for a tax on the land value. It is the most equitable and easiest to administer. But according to the strange logic of Roger Gale a single individual living in a multimillion pound mansion in the heart of London should contribute no more to the community than the poor man supporting a large family in an overcrowded slum.

What is really lost in these ideas of Barwell or Gale is any comprehension that a nation is a community, and that any form of taxation is ultimately meant to serve the whole community in common. But sadly, the Conservative Party conceives society as a market-place to be exploited for private gain, and that nobody owes anything towards the common good. Therefore we can only accept that homelessness is a natural consequence of market forces. Britain, over the last hundred years, while increasing the wealth of a few, has become a land of even deeper moral poverty.

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Joseph Milne 
editor@landandliberty.net

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NEW YORK CITY – On a sunny day in Manhattan I am standing beside a small fruit stand looking up at yet another high-arching, beautiful building across the road. Without a doubt my father would eagerly try to use an opportunity like this to point out just how unnatural the very existence of such a tall building is. Unnatural and odd – like an inner-city fruit and vegetable stand. I look at the same pretty skyscraper and see something slightly different. I see a decent amount of audacity and coarse fearlessness. Essentially, what I really see is a whole lot of America.

Later that day, I meet up with Russ who is eager to give me a tour of his city and talk about its history and development. He wants to meet in front of the Trump International Hotel and Tower. That one is not so pretty.

Russ walks with me to Central Park and immediately starts talking about New York’s urban aesthetic, the Park and city planning in general:

“In 1811 the New York City Commissioner released a report basically planning out the future of the city. In this report the grid plan was laid out. If you go down to the older parts of the city, Lower Manhattan or Greenwich Village, you see one side of New York. It’s like the older parts of London. It’s all low buildings and organically evolved space. It’s really after 14th Street that it gets grand. Now, the basic concept of what later became Central Park was laid out in this 1811 report as well. Originally, the main park was supposed to be at 23rd Street, more or less where Madison Square Park is today. The basic reason why this didn’t happen was that when the time the city officials were ready to commit to something like this, too many people were living [in the area]. There were too many businesses, too many people to displace, too many buildings to buy out. So, by the time the city decided to create the park in the mid-nineteenth century they had to push the project further north. Essentially, the people living further north were marginal enough [to become subjects to relocation].”

This is the story of New York City. The story of near uncontrollable economic growth and expansion, of almost explosive population growth, of human beings getting pushed outwards (if they were unlucky) or being pushed upwards (if they were luckier); in the end culminating with that most shiny, most splendid piece of glass and steel America: the New York skyscraper.

But why here? Why did this particular place on the American West Coast become the beating heart of the global economy as well as the birthplace of the modern hyper-structure? Why not, for instance, Philadelphia? Did nature somehow play its part here? Russ believes he has a good guess as to why, and it relates to exactly that – the fruits of nature:

“New York was first and foremost a sea port. Really, the whole reason [why] New York became New York is because we have one of the world’s best natural harbours. That made New York a main port for shipping. And because it became a main port for shipping it also became a main port for insurance and financial speculation, which New York still dominates around the world today”. Russ continues: “Especially later in American history when we started building larger ships that needed a bigger draft this had an effect. Baltimore and Boston at the time of the [American] revolution were essentially more populous than New York. The reason why New York ended up becoming dominant was, again, because of that natural harbour. When the largest ships sailed into Boston they were forced to offload their cargo at sea and row it in. In Manhattan it was easier to bring the ships right into the dock. So, slowly, New York became a manufacturing capital of the United States, which people tend to forget today. It was simply easier to ship your materials in and later ship your products out from this city”.

Manufacturing and factories meant jobs. And jobs meant people arriving in New York from just about every nation on Earth. Soon New York would find itself becoming a microcosm of the global economic trends characterizing the second half of the nineteenth century. Industrialization meant urbanization and a profound shift in economic focus away from farming (which also characterized Manhattan immediately after the island was colonized) to a clearer focus on specialized industry and trade.

The very appearance of New York changed rapidly for the same reasons. In the wake of this profound change critical housing problems became the reality for many working-class New Yorkers. The city simply became more and more dense. This density combined with the before mentioned overall shift towards industry and trade pushed the price of land upwards and laid the foundation for the remarkable urban skyline I can admire as Russ and I stroll through the city today.

In its essence, the mighty skyscraper was the rational and logical reaction to the economic and social factors I mention here. It was thought to be the most reasonable answer to a booming city’s accumulative growing pains. Growing pains underlined further by the increasing scarcity of land on the island of Manhattan would eventually lead to more and more zoning in an honest attempt by city officials to somehow control the city’s rapid expansion. But the zoning (restrictions on land use) – in effect – only created even more land scarcity. Add to this several significant advances in technology; from escalators to basic strengthening of building materials such as steel and concrete and the effects on the city became irrevocable. The price of construction gradually went down which, of course, drove the price of land further up. Yes, the shape and height of the New York City was here to stay; and to evolve even further.
The shape of the individual mega-buildings is fascinating in and of itself. Endless literature describing the essentials of every single New York architectural style or building-ornamentation trend throughout its history can effortlessly be found at any well-curated library. But one of the more interesting ideas about the physical appearance of skyscrapers can be attributed to Carol Willis, who in her 1995 book *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* pointed out that these gravity-defying constructions are essentially designed from the “inside out”.

You start with a fundamental understanding of the skyscraper’s main occupant, the office worker inside, and contemplate the basic requirements of office space needed to ensure this individual’s optimal productivity. And so you lay out the basic floorplan complete with elevators, washrooms and so on. At this point you want the office worker to have access to natural sunlight, and so you start emphasizing large windows as part of your basic design. You will also want the office worker who is placed a little further away from these large windows to enjoy natural sunlight, and because of this you make sure that you maximize the height of every floor ceiling whilst trying to limit the space between the tall windows and the innermost walls of the building. You can then start building your architectural LEGO tower of floors upon floors maximizing the return on your investment in the land below this structure.

Back in New York, I say goodbye to Russ and step underground to take the subway downtown from Columbus Circle. The train cars are completely packed this afternoon, and the scene resembles any clichéd New York movie scene you might imagine. The New York City Subway – much like the skyscrapers sitting right above – is an impressive, virtually mind-boggling, engineering achievement.

Evident on this day, it is also an entity that draws human beings very close together: This, of course, is not some original thought. But it can dearly be applied to many things in this city. The interconnected well-organized infrastructure, the powerful institutions, the ever-present cultural options to choose from, the buildings. It all creates a demand and a dependency. I can easily feel these forces even as a humble visitor. The city and everything it offers will draw you inwards and lock you there.

Before I leave the United States, I spend some time in a small bookstore in Brooklyn. Here I stumble upon a thick hardcover with a striking image of the Seagram Building – an architectural jewel on Park Avenue conceived by German-born architect Mies van der Rohe in his distinctive international style. I consider buying the book simply for the intrinsic aesthetic of the cover, but spend a couple of minutes skimming through the considerable number of pages. Perhaps I can locate some interesting thoughts about skyscrapers and land values that I can use for writing my little article upon my return? I discover that the book has a short index in the back. I look under the letter L and quickly realize that this book has precisely zero index-worthy mentions of the word land. I am holding a book about skyscrapers. A thick book.

So what I am essentially about to purchase here is the same-old story about the tall New York City skyscrapers: a whole lot about the characteristic iconography, the famous architects, the technological advances that made it all possible, the impressive engineering and the forward-thinking property developers that made them a reality. If I am truly lucky I might even find a chapter describing the hard yet oh-so-poetic life of the construction worker, possibly accompanied by a famous photograph of him eating lunch on a steel beam with his not-at-all-afraid-of-heights colleagues.

Evidently, what I won’t be purchasing is a story about the following truth: that the cause of the New York skyline is not to be found in the world of architecture, engineering, property development, technology or the, possibly, poetic life of that construction worker high above ground. The root cause of the very existence of the skyscraper you ironically won’t be finding by looking up, but... by looking down.

The rising land values underneath the skyscrapers became the very catalyst for their birth. And whilst the economy grew this effect only manifested itself – nowhere more evident than on the majestic, but expensive, streets of Manhattan – initially gifted by nature with its exceptional natural harbour.

As the demand for the prime locations in the city rose and rose developers had but one choice: To try to “create” more land above the street level to somehow accommodate an increasing number of people and businesses. To try to create useful, productive land in the air: the skyscraper. And thus, with these prideful structures the value of the actual land underneath rose even more.

But this story is not one I will find in the graphically-pleasing skyscraper book in my little Brooklyn bookstore. Eventually I put the pretty volume back on its shelf and fly back home to Europe the following day.
It is a season of great discontent for many of us around the globe. Here in the United States of America we are experiencing a troubling and challenging period characterized by a deep ideological division and a broad distrust of our elected representatives. Corporate lobbyists exert what many believe is a destructive influence on legislation and regulation at the state and federal levels of government. Conservatives battle Progressives over the limits to freedoms guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution. In a very real sense, we have come to the culmination of the process begun by Ronald Reagan to re-establish a New Federalism. If we are honest with ourselves, however, the idea that the U.S.A. is one country, its citizens one people, has always been something of a myth. I suspect that Thomas Paine would agree.

For much of the twentieth century, the process that directed domestic and foreign policies in the United States was the willingness to compromise in order to gain consensus. This was the essence of liberalism. There existed an unspoken acceptance of the need for change described by political scientists as disjointed incrementalism. Principle took a back seat to practical political necessities. Those who rose to positions of leadership in government, business, labor, education, grant-making foundations and even citizen activists accepted the confines of liberalism. No one wanted to throw the baby out with the bath water. Some of the lessons of history seemed to have been well learned.

From the moment the first Europeans arrived on the shores of North America, there arose one conflict after another between the Non-Europeans and the strange but powerfully-armed peoples who arrived from beyond the horizon in huge wooden ships. As soon as enough of these Europeans established themselves in coastal settlements and explored inland, the conflicts over control of territory and resources began. As the numbers of Spanish, Dutch, French, English and other European groups increased, they largely thought of the Non-European peoples as irritants to be removed. And, more often than not, each European group thought of each other in the same way.

Despite almost continuous warfare in North America, people from around the world kept coming. Some were adventurers. Some sought escape from religious, racial or ethnic oppression. All hoped for a better quality of life. Thanks to the encouragement of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine was among those who made the journey. Until the year 1924, the laws of the United States of America imposed few restrictions on those who came, so long as they were of European origin. Only the Chinese and other Asians were specifically prohibited by law from entering the country.
Those who arrived from the land of their forefathers tended to congregate in enclaves where cultural norms and language were familiar. Assimilation into the dominant, Anglo-American community often took generations. During the early decades of the 19th century, one ethnic group that held fast to their Old World culture were those who came from Germany. As historian Marcus Lee Hansen observed:

“Resistance to Americanization proved strongest in the old congregations on the plains between the Delaware and the Susquehanna. The bulk of their members were German-born and German-trained, knowing little of their adopted country apart from the rural parishes in which they lived...”³

Before the frontier was declared closed⁴ by historian Frederick Jackson Turner at the dawn of the twentieth century, the pattern of European-American settlement across the continent was dominated by small communities with most of the residents still engaged in agriculture. Henry George described how the arrival of railroads both tied these communities together and accelerated the concentration of income and wealth in the growing towns and cities. During the decades following the defeat of the Southern Confederacy, African-Americans in large numbers also joined the migration. The America to which the next wave of immigrants came was changing rapidly:

“Along the city’s unyielding asphalt streets, beside the rutted roads of mill or mining towns, amidst the exciting prairie acres, they established the homes of the New World. But wherever the immigrants went, there was one common experience they shared: nowhere could they transplant the European village.”

The mixture of the races, of peoples of different Old World heritage, language, culture and religion seriously challenged the appearance of apparent equality painted by Alexis de Tocqueville following his visit earlier in the 19th century. The nation’s major cities were increasingly overcrowded, unsanitary and dismal places. Many immigrants came to wish they had never left the land of their birth:

“As the passing years widened the distance, the land the immigrants had left acquired charm and beauty. Present problems blurred those they had left unsolved behind; and in the haze of memory it seemed to these people they had formerly been free of present dissatisfactions. It was as if the Old World became a great mirror into which they looked to see right all that was wrong with the New.”⁶

Leading figures in the nation concluded that the most effective way to bring this diverse population together as Americans was to establish in every community systems of publicly-funded and publicly-administered schools. The children of immigrants would be taught to read and write in English. They were also taught what it meant to be an American. The rationale for universal public education arose as early as the late 1830s, led by Horace Mann, the secretary of education of Massachusetts. By 1900, thirty-four states required compulsory education for children up to age 14 or even higher. Eighteen years later, every state required all children to complete school through grade six.

Americans have often been described as a restless people, relocating from one state to another in search of better economic opportunities or just for a less extreme climate. One result is that in every large city and even in smaller towns there are distinct ethnic neighborhoods, where generations of families continue to hold fast to at least some of the Old World values of their immigrant forefathers. This pattern of internal migration changed only after the end of the Second World War. The rapid expansion of the interstate highway system spawned the development of new housing subdivisions surrounding every city. The adult children of many immigrants moved to the new suburbs, where the process of assimilation accelerated, even as economic and racial segregation remained. America was not quite a melting pot but its institutions were forced to adjust to the changing reality of where people lived and worked.

Our early history as a nation was characterized by a build-up of sectional tensions that could not be reduced by compromise, and the result was civil war. How do we explain the form the American system took until power shifted to the federal government during the years of the Great Depression? The territory of the United States might be separated from the Old World by two wide oceans, but the nation was still very much affected by world events. In his book The Conservatives, historian Patrick Allitt provides an interesting insight:

“The Russian Revolution was a turning point in the history of American conservatism. Throughout the nineteenth century the United States had been in many ways the world’s revolutionary leader. After 1917, by contrast, it became, in the eyes of supporters and detractors alike, the world’s counterrevolutionary leader, trying to forestall the triumph of a newer and more radical political and economic system. Another characteristic of American conservatism from then on was that it would receive a steady succession of new recruits from former communists, in revolt against the horrible reality behind an ideology that had at first attracted them.”⁷

Responding to the emergencies of a nationwide economic depression and a global war dramatically increased the presence of the federal government in the everyday lives of citizens. The wartime sacrifices made by African-Americans emboldened returning servicemen and others to demand their rightful civil liberties. Women called into the workforce during the war were emboldened to demand greater opportunities and status beyond that of homemaker and mother. Young men and women who postponed marriage and starting families began to make up for lost time, and military veterans were assisted by government programs that provided affordable housing and access to college education or technical training. For millions of U.S. households the prospects for an improving standard of living was set in motion.

Economists, such as Rexford Tugwell⁸, played significant advisory and administrative roles during the Presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. By the end of the Second World War, economists held positions at the highest levels of government. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman signed the Employment Act, one provision of which was the formation of the first Council of Economic Advisers. By 1949 the Council became dominated by economists who asserted the economy could support both rising spending on defense as well as on social welfare entitlements, even if this meant there would be large budget deficits. The idea that public revenue ought to come from location and natural resource rents
was never seriously considered. U.S. political leaders were also soon committed to whatever spending was required to stop the expansion of communism around the world.

Dwight Eisenhower had warned the country against the growing influence of what he described as the “military-industrial complex”. Yet, it was Eisenhower who provided the French with funds to try to hold onto their colonial interests in Indo-China. When the French army was defeated, the Americans stepped in, hoping to prevent yet another communist regime from being established. Lyndon Johnson spent the nation into an inflationary spiral trying to win the war on poverty and defeat the Viet Cong at the same time. Richard Nixon, although a Republican and nominally a fiscal conservative, announced to the U.S. public that he had become a Keynesian. To win a second term as President, Nixon demanded cheap money and even more government spending. The U.S. (and most of the world) drifted into the economic and social morass of stagflation. By 1980, inflation had risen to 14% in the U.S., and the country was ready to try something different. Enter Ronald Reagan.

Reaganomics embraced deregulation, a reduction of marginal tax rates on individuals and businesses and a commitment to break the power of labor unions. At the Federal Reserve, Chairman Paul Volcker used the tools at his disposal to halt inflation. He let interest rates climb. Demand for credit fell, business activity stalled, unemployment rose and the U.S. slid into recession. Reagan’s tentative gamble of supply-side economics failed to achieve the promised outcomes of a robust investment in production and an increase in federal revenue. Conservatives of the 18th century would have recognized the theoretical arguments as presented by Reagan economics adviser Arthur Laffer’s. The historical pendulum was swinging back toward a more laissez-faire relationship between government and business, as those who had guided economic policy for three decades struggled to explain why the economy was simultaneously plagued by high unemployment and high inflation. 10

In 1982, Ronald Reagan attempted to transfer responsibility for many Federal programs to individual states. His proposals proved to be far too ambitious, even for most Republicans then in the U.S. Congress. He was also opposed by the National Governors Association. Fast forward to today, and the final phases of new federalism are being carried out by Republican-dominated governments many states as well as the federal level,

The willingness to compromise that characterized the decades of American liberalism began to dissolve as the responsibilities of global leadership brought on serious challenges to domestic tranquility. In 1963, William F. Buckley, Jr. responded with a description of the situation that was soon to unravel:

“Every year, whether the Republican or the Democratic Party is in office, more and more power drains away from the individual to feed vast reservoirs in far-off places; and we have less and less say about the shape of events which shape our future. From this alienation of personal power comes the sense of resignation with which we accept the political dispensations of a powerful government whose hold upon us continues to increase.” 11

“When our voices are finally mute, when we have finally suppressed the natural instinct to complain, whether the vexation is trivial or grave, we shall have become automatons, incapable of feeling.” 12

Buckley would not have to wait very long for Americans to raise their voices in reaction to a world changing in ways not to their liking. We remain a citizenry deeply divided by our fundamental value systems, by political ideology, by racial and ethnic prejudices, by conflicting views of what constitutes human rights, by our views on the role religious doctrine ought to play in the operation of public institutions and by extent to which our laws reflect justice and are justly enforced. And, of course, there is an almost total disregard for the injustice associated with the private appropriation of the rents derived from nature.

What I foresee as a reasonable possibility is the eventual break-up of the United States into confederacies of states joined together by shared cultural norms, values and ideological belief systems. Perhaps at least one such confederacy would find guidance from Paine’s The Rights of Man and Agrarian Justice or from George’s Progress and Poverty. This may be precipitated by the migration of tens of millions of people to regions of the United States where they feel their own values are most strongly embraced. Some have already chosen another country. For a very long time now, decisions to relocate have been made for non-political reasons. That could change. We have already experienced changes in the laws of states that are attractive or repulsive to some segments of the nation’s population. It is possible that some states would merge and others divide into two or more new, sovereign nations.

While the details of this story are unique to the United States of America, a broad survey of emerging trends around the globe suggests a future in which many changes in territorial boundaries are on the horizon. As Thomas Paine would observe, the times that try men’s souls continue.}[The author would like to acknowledge the valuable comments and suggestions provided to him by Alexandra Lough, who kindly agreed to read a draft of this article.]

References:

1) The Spanish Conquistadors sought to find the sources of gold and other precious metals they assumed the tribal peoples were mining. Priests and other missionaries sought to convert these Non-Europeans to the Christianity of their particular religious sect.

2) Asians were excluded under the Burlingame and Angell treaties. The Chinese Exclusion Act was followed by the Geary Act of 1892, made permanent in 1902.


4) It must be noted that most historians do not accept the definition put forward by Frederick Jackson Turner. The continent was, in fact, occupied by millions of Non-European peoples and never actually “open” as implied by Turner.


6) Ibid., pp.260-261.


8) Rexford Tugwell was one of three Columbia University professors invited in 1932 to join President Roosevelt’s team of advisers known as the “Brain Trust.” He served in the administration as Assistant Secretary, then Undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The other members were Raymond Moley and Adolph A. Berle, Jr.

9) Arthur Laffer, a professor at the USC Marshall School of Business, played a key role in the drafting of California’s Proposition 13, which imposed a cap on property taxation in the state. In 1981 he became a member of Ronald Reagan’s Economic Policy Advisory Board.

10) In 1958, a New Zealand economist named William Phillips, postulated an inverse relationship between money wages and changed in unemployment. Many economists subsequently came to believe this was a permanently stable relationship. During the 1970s the so-called “Phillips Curve” had disappeared under the stress of stagflation.


12) Ibid., p.251
Natural rights are accorded as birthrights by Nature to every living individual on earth to support their civil and economic existence. Yet the gift of Nature is often ignored and human rights formulated by man are preferred. The difference between rights founded on Nature and those formulated without aspiration to harmonise the natural order is clearly illustrated in the present order of society in both civil and economic terms. Present society is plagued by unresolved poverty in which the mass of society cannot earn their independence, cannot care for themselves and their families. Natural rights are implanted in human nature. Human rights are created in words on paper.

The evolution of society from early evidence of existence to the present is accompanied by the realisation that the protection of individual rights requires the development of society to replace clan, community and tribe in order to protect them. Indeed, the struggle to protect natural individual rights is a grand and noble aim that goes to the roots of society. The evolutionary jump that powerful interests do not want even to consider is to create a just society that would constitute a wonder of a new world. But this essay covers the modern history of the discovery and, unhappily, the burial of natural rights.

The rights of individuals runs through English history. Magna Carta is often cited as a hallmark enactment that began the process. Yet it was not a measure whereby the Crown afforded rights to threatening nobles in order to preserve his rule. The real progress in establishing the civil rights of individuals accompanied the rise over eight centuries of common law and strongly from the fourteenth century the demands of the people for basic civil rights denied to them at different times by the Church, Crown, Parliament and the judiciary. It is easy to forget that the law of the land depends on both the administration of justice and the people’s struggles for their civil liberties. The public sense of justice has played a powerful but unseen part in the operation of the common law.

The modern political debate over the rights of individuals broke during the second half of the seventeenth century. Thomas Hobbes, after the Civil War that had shocked him, developed the twin ideas that individuals possessed only such rights as the sovereign was pleased to award them and that they served the State, or the body Leviathan, as bees serve a beehive. Sir Robert Filmer’s book on royal authority, Patriarcha, was published in 1680. He argued on scriptural authority that the king ruled by Divine Right. Thus stood the question of the rights of the individual: absolute human authority backed by the Creator.

John Locke attacked both propositions in his book, Two Treatises of Government that was published in the year 1692. In the first, he examined the scriptural authorities claimed by Filmer and found them wanting. Later, he discountenanced the idea that Conquest covered only the generation conquered rather than their heirs or their lands. In the second treatise, he argued that human rights derived as the birthrights of Nature. The second chapter begins:

To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their laws of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.

Locke had turned a page of political thought from the medieval to the modern age. Voltaire toured England during a period of exile in the 1720s. He was encouraged that English people no longer discussed, let alone fought over, religion. He was inspired by the new thinking of Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and Locke whom he praised on his return to Paris. His account of his travels took hold among thinkers who embraced these three as founders of the Enlightenment.

That movement caused a profound change of introducing science. Science brought with it an objective enquiry that could
be substantiated by Nature. It involved in many fields leaps in imagination to posit a proposition to be tested against the natural order.

The scientific spirit challenged, for example, the idea that the manifest order was composed of the traditional four elements of air, fire, earth and water. These were discovered to be compounds of other elements. Air contained oxygen, hydrogen, carbon dioxide and so with the other three. Physics and chemistry led the scientific movement and biology, zoology, botany followed. The path was not always clear of religious doctrine and traditional understanding. That was vividly illustrated by Charles Darwin keeping back his magnum opus for decades in order not to offend the book of Genesis and those who believed it, like his wife.

However, public opinion was disturbed by the introduction of economic science that was to extend natural rights beyond civil rights. Its founder of this branch of science was François Quesnay, a French surgeon. He began to study Chinese philosophy that became popular in Europe after the publication of works of Confucius in Latin in 1585. He has derived much from the Way of Nature. Quesnay became prominent after he treated an epileptic commanding adroitness at a party. The royal mistress had him installed at Versailles as physician to Louis XV.

His conversation with the king turned invariably to economic matters, in which he advanced the just and reasonable idea that the most fertile land in an agricultural society should bear the need of taxation. Moreover, Quesnay demonstrated that the most fertile land returned a surplus over the more marginal and greater areas of France. Therefore, a tax would not interfere with the profits or earnings earned from agriculture. For that reason Quesnay termed it a tax on the produit net or net of the rewards of labour and costs of production.

A young scholar, Anne-Robert Turgot, whose political thinking was greatly influenced by Voltaire, Bacon and Locke, was immediately attracted by Quesnay’s idea of the produit net. For it accorded with reason, Nature and justice at a time when taxation under the ancien régime was levied on the poorest and avoided largely by the many ranks of privilege. Quesnay attracted a number of young men who regarded him as their master. They were associated at Versailles with the insistent idea of limiting the expenditure of government and became known, accordingly, as les économistes. Quesnay was carried away by his ideas and in 1758 published his work Tableau Économique that Turgot described as a work of ‘algebra’ and ‘fartas’ [jumble] written by a ‘patriarch’. Turgot stood apart from the sectarian spirit that enveloped their thinking. The économistes styled themselves as Physiocrats. After the death of Mme de Pompadour in 1764, Quesnay was removed from Versailles and the group dissolved and its journals were suppressed.

Turgot pursued the establishment of the natural rights of the individual with relentless reason, unblemished faith in Nature and a passionate pursuit of justice. He introduced the first steps in economic science of an agricultural society. In five volumes of his political career only a single page, involving the protection of a grower of rose madder, was at variance with his principles. His integrity, his motives and the foundations of his political thinking were of a high standard. He served thirteen years as an Intendant, before being summoned to the King’s Council by young Louis XVI. As contrôleur général he served eighteen months before being brought down by the full weight of the ancien régime - led by the Prime Minister and Marie-Antoinette, the Court, the Church, the nobles, the parliaments, the monopolists, the tax collectors and the other privileged. With his dismissal the introduction of economic science was buried.

Shortly after the death of his friend Condorcet wrote a biography of Turgot. Its opening paragraphs convey a timeless relevance.

Among the multitude of ministers, who, during a short period, govern the fate of nations, there are a few who merit the attention of posterity. If they merely held principles and prejudices in common with the age in which they lived, of what moment is the name of one who has done what a thousand others in his place would have done as well?

General history serves to record the events in which they had a share. There we find that such a minister, raised from the crowd of the ambitious, was more eager to obtain his office than to deserve it; that he was more anxious to prolong his administration than to make it useful. There we see the ill that such men do from ambition, the ill that they permit from ignorance or irresolution; sometimes the good that they have attempted without success, and more rarely the good that they have been able to effect. The history of their ideas, and even of their virtues, may be read in the opinions and prejudices of their contemporaries.
But if there appear among these a man, who has received from nature a superior strength of reason, accompanied with peculiar virtues and principles of action, and whose genius has so far outrun the acquisitions of his age as not to be understood by it; the life of such a minister may be interesting to every age and nation. His example may long be useful. His authority may give to important truths that sanction, which reason itself sometimes stands in need of.

The introduction of economic science was an important part of the Enlightenment. It provided a just foundation to the Industrial Revolution and to the new world of the American colonies. America became independent in the year that Turgot was sacked ‘in disgrace’. He had been a friend of Benjamin Franklin who derived strength from friends in Paris at a time that he was not in contact with London. He met Franklin frequently in the salons. He entered a correspondence with him and warned against the imposition of taxation on productive industry. He added the memorial inscription to a portrait of Franklin; ‘Erupuit caelo fulmen scepturumsque tyrannis’ - he stole lightning from heaven and the spectre from tyrants.

Turgot became particularly interested in the development of what he saw as a refuge of mankind that could be free of the political errors of the Old World. But the founding fathers preferred to adopt Locke as a guiding authority. They were not troubled by the error of Locke concerning the acquisition of land that Turgot exposed as a denial of Nature and natural rights. Land he held was given as a natural element, as air, sunshine and water, to every person equally. America also adopted Adam Smith as another authority. His assertion that self-interest was the engine to every person equally. America also adopted Adam Smith as another authority. His assertion that self-interest was the engine that created society appealed to pioneers of a new continent. Yet Locke had written a century earlier in his Essay on Nature:

"What reason is left for the fulfilment of promises, what protection for the interests, what sense of community and common purpose between men, when equity and justice are the same as self-interest?"

Smith is hailed in America particularly as a leading member of the Enlightenment. However, there is no evidence of a progression of reasoned argument, little interest in Nature and none whatever in justice. The Enlightenment, in so far as it concerned economic justice, passed by Smith, was stamped out by the ancien regime and buried by its tragic revolution. Then it was ignored in America that blindly submitted to the political errors of Europe.

However, the quest for economic science, surely a most important branch of science affecting the daily existence of millions, re-emerged in America after the Industrial Revolution had swept through the West, in a matter of two or three decades by about 1860. Society had progressed from an agricultural state of the eighteenth century into an urbanised, industrial society. The same foundations Turgot were in the changed conditions to produce a more extensive development of economic science. It was due to one man, Henry George, who possessed none of the advantages of Turgot, who left a modest school at the age of thirteen, who studied no early influences such as Voltaire, Locke and Quesnay and who attained no public office.

George was born in 1839 on the east coast of Philadelphia. After he left school, there was no work and much unemployment. He visited the docks and was lured by the talk of sailors to travel at seventeen by schooner to Australia. When he arrived in Melbourne he paid only one visit ashore when he encountered the familiar evidence of unemployment. In Calcutta the poverty was worse. He returned and learnt typesetting. A cousin living in Oregon wrote of a land of prosperity. George caught a schooner sailing round the southern tip of South America to San Francisco. On arrival the familiar scene of poverty greeted him. To escape he joined a gold rush in the northern state of Columbia on the Fraser River. The best diggings were occupied and what remained yielded little. He returned to San Francisco and found employment as a typesetter. The President, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated in 1865. George wrote an obituary that merited his move into journalism.

All the while he was absorbed by the cause of mass poverty in a modern society. He remembered two conversations. An old typesetter in Philadelphia and a miner on the Fraser River had each observed that as the population grew so earnings would fall. There remarks inspired George to discover the reason why this should occur. While puzzling this paradox he wrote in 1868 about the consequences of the railroads being constructed eastwards across the continent. In San Francisco there was much jubilation and expectation of the benefits that would result. George remained cool-headed. The railroads would bring riches to the builders who received swathes of land on either side of the track instead of state subsidies. While it made for a few riches, the locomotive would also convey the tramp. He wrote a pamphlet that reminded a friend of the thinking of the French économistes. George owed nothing to them and only later did he become acquainted with Turgot with whom he shared the same foundations of thinking. Indeed, they were fellow scientists of the Enlightenment.

While riding his horse in the hills above Oakland George stopped to talk to a stranger. He asked casually what land was worth there. ‘I don’t know exactly,’ replied the stranger and, pointing in the direction of some grazing cows on far hills that seemed like mice, ‘a thousand dollars an acre.’ This simple exchange suddenly crystallised his brooding thought. George described the ‘ecstatic vision’ that came to him:

"Like a flash it came upon me that there was a reason for advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and men who work it must pay for the privilege. I turned back amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me and has been with me ever since."

By such moments or flashes does science reveal itself to its most ardent students.

His thinking rested on his magnum opus, Progress and Poverty, showing that as people congregated in cities the value of land rises while the level of earnings are determined by competition of people seeking work on land already enclosed. Thus the level falls from true productivity of work to the least that an individual will accept. He developed a theme that Turgot had elaborated in his essay, Réflexions, in 1766, explaining how the level of earnings came to be fixed by the same process but he had not seen the effect of a rising population on the value of land. But George developed the insight more extensively.

George showed how the two principles determine important natural rights beyond civil rights. Freedom of speech, from arbitrary arrest and the like count for nothing in the determination of such crucial matters of the natural rights involved in the
distribution of wealth and the distribution of property between what is naturally private - created by individual labour - and naturally public - created by a society. George had opened the question of natural rights to the wider dimension that could only arise in a just democracy. That ideal society that eludes mankind is like an undiscovered wonder.

Progress and Poverty became a best-seller that was translated into the major languages of the world. George became known outside America as a figure to rank with Thomas Edison and Henry James. George’s second book, Protection or Free Trade, was beautifully written and comprehensively argued. It recalls the eloquence that Turgot had deployed on the question. It will long remain a classic on a perennial truth of the natural free order of trade and commerce. George had travelled to the British Isles, Australia and New Zealand lecturing. His thinking took hold firmly in Scotland. Local municipalities demanded powers to impose rates on the value of land. They enlisted the support of the Liberal Party who came to office after their triumph in the General Election of 1906. Their demands brought the question to the agenda of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s government. Winston Churchill mastered the case for both the taxation of land value and the freedom of trade. He delivered the most eloquent speeches on both questions during the first decade of the twentieth century. Unfortunately the Prime Minister died in 1908. His successor, Herbert Asquith, appointed David Lloyd George to deliver the reform of taxation. He completely lost control of the issue that he never really understood and the First World War all but ended the radical spirit. But Philip Snowden, a founder of the Labour Party, had heard George speak in Aberdeen at the age of twenty-one. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer and in the Budget of 1931 introduced the valuation of land. He was also an ardent supporter of free trade. When he resigned through ill-health that year, free trade was overthrown by the only country in the developed world to have adopted it. The valuation of land was also terminated. Thus ended the pursuit of natural rights in British politics.

Both Turgot and George have been almost erased from the historical record. Turgot was admired with ‘wonder’ in France to have adopted it. The valuation of land was also terminated. When he resigned through ill-health that year, free trade. He delivered the most eloquent speeches on both questions during the first decade of the twentieth century. Unfortunately the Prime Minister died in 1908. His successor, Herbert Asquith, appointed David Lloyd George to deliver the reform of taxation. He completely lost control of the issue that he never really understood and the First World War all but ended the radical spirit. But Philip Snowden, a founder of the Labour Party, had heard George speak in Aberdeen at the age of twenty-one. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer and in the Budget of 1931 introduced the valuation of land. He was also an ardent supporter of free trade. When he resigned through ill-health that year, free trade was overthrown by the only country in the developed world to have adopted it. The valuation of land was also terminated. Thus ended the pursuit of natural rights in British politics.

recalled a meeting in Oxford at which Alfred Marshall had branded him with consummate condescension and pomposity as ‘untrained’.

To erase the thinking of these two men, who were pioneers of a most important science, prevented the evolution of a just society. The multitude awake each day to think about keeping their head above poverty rather than the force of gravity throughout the Universe. The character of both men would encourage posterity to concentrate on the ideas founded on reason, Nature and justice rather than upon them personally. For it is important to rise to the scale in which natural rights become self-evident. Turgot would have advised most emphatically against forming sects and sectarian ideas. He endlessly wrote against the habit of ‘we think’ in place of what ‘I think’. The struggle to secure natural rights is the great challenge to achieve the evolution of societies from the jungle to justice; much grander than a sectarian squabble.

Such enquiry would expose the cause of mass poverty disabling an individual achieving independence and fulfilling personal responsibilities for the education of children, healthcare and retirement. That unresolved cause of poverty has justified the rise of socialism throughout Europe. It has mitigated the effects of poverty instead of reforming its unjust causes. The Old World has contributed a second-rate example of unjust societies and America has followed cap in hand.

The barrier to harmonising human society with the benign provision of Nature is that people are blinded to the evidence because they do not want to know. The ruling attitude is ‘to hell with Nature, that is only for dogs and gardens! Human society must be created by political action’. Politicians are said to live in the real world. If the political order throughout the globe is real, let us forsake study altogether so that man can at last appreciate the real drama of Punch and Judy. Without a profound approach to the objectivity of economic science, the natural birthrights of every individual walking upon the earth are ignored or misconceived. This is a state of fact, not a criticism of government, who mirror the political thinking in the mind of the public.

Finally, it is time to re-consider natural duties. The coupling of rights and duties seems at first sight like two sides of a coin; each right carries with it a corresponding duty. This way of thinking leads easily to a mismatch of natural rights implanted by Nature with moral duties devised by man. The natural balance between rights and duties exists in human nature. For example, every individual inherits at birth the right of free speech without a duty not to libel or injure another. Natural rights are of fundamental importance since they represent the birthrights of every individual on earth. It is necessary to give account of how they came to be discovered in the modern world before being largely discontenanced by it. There are three duties associated with natural rights: to establish natural rights by reason, to teach the same, and to comprehend how they might be delivered by a just society.

The Enlightenment introduced a new order of objective science but economic science, perhaps the most simple and the most important, was rejected. Mankind stands at the edge of another moment of renaissance three centuries later. The need of economic science based on the profound foundations shared by Turgot and George are still too grand for present societies to want to understand or implement.
Daly and Cobb draw particular attention to the disregard of land in modern economics. They note that in classical economics land, along with labour and capital, was a principle factor of wealth creation. Land means 'nature', the whole earth, the dwelling place of humanity and all other living beings. But gradually it was reduced to a resource for unlimited exploitation, then to property that can be disposed of according to the whim of the owner, then into capital, and finally into abstract 'space'. From the Georgist perspective, as well as from the environmental perspective, this abstraction of land into mere space and final disappearance from modern economics is profound importance.

How did this gradual abstraction happen? Daly and Cobb propose that it began with the failure to see land as an active part of human life. Economists increasingly assumed that land was a passive element and labour an active element. The fact that nature causes the crops to grow and brings into being every other physical thing, including human beings themselves, is passed over. Nature becomes a passive resource that labour shapes into desirable things. This way of thinking has its roots, Daly and Cobb argue, not in economics as such, but in the dualistic philosophy initiated by Descartes. "Descartes divided the world into two metaphysically distinct orders: mind and matter", mind having subjectivity and intelligence, and matter producing mere 'automata'. In this way the human subject has primacy over matter. This then becomes the basis of value theory:

It is evident that this Cartesian worldview has provided the context and assumtional matrix for economic thought. For economic theory, value is to be found solely in the satisfaction of human desires. The subjective theory of value has totally replaced earlier "real" theories of value that took land or labor as the locus of value.

Despite the philosophical demise of the Cartesian worldview, it remains unconsciously pervasive in economic thinking. It sustains the opinion that 'the world' is there to be 'mastered' by human desire. Thus Daly and Cobb assert:

In short, the typical modern dualism reappears in economic theory from Adam Smith to the present. On the one side there are human beings, the satisfaction of whose wants is the single end of economic activity. On the other side there is everything else, all of which comes into consideration only as means to the end of satisfying human wants.

By assuming that only human wants are the concern of economics the real living world is abstracted into an inexhaustible resource for human consumption, abolishing the true relationship between human society and the earth. The abstracted land is neither the dwelling place of any living being nor has any significance in itself.

The end result of this story is that, despite many dissident voices, the discipline of economics has come to treat land as a mixture of space and expendable, or easily substitutable, capital. Both are treated as commodities, that is, as subject to exchange in the marketplace and as having their value determined exclusively in this exchange. Land is no longer a factor of production in any important sense. It is relegated to the level of a "residual" in econometric models that estimate the relative roles of capital and labor in production.

This book is a call to reconsider the theoretical basis of economics and to establish a holistic understanding of the relationship between the good of society and nature. ❗️
BOOKS WORTH READING
For those interested in a clear and penetrating history of political thought from ancient Greek, Roman, and Medieval periods to the present, there is no better book than Michael Oakeshott’s *Lectures in the History of Political Thought*, based on the lecture course he delivered at the London School of Economics 1966 – 1967.

What makes these lectures outstanding is that Oakeshott draws out the changing conceptions of society that shaped the political thinking and concerns of each era. The religious traditions of each age also play a major role in how human nature and society are conceived. For example, one cannot properly understand Greek politics without understanding Greek cosmology, the gods, or the Greek conception of nature. Similarly, Oakeshott shows how the politics of Rome can be grasped only through understanding that Roman citizenship meant being part of the cult of Romulus, so that for the Romans citizenship and religion were the same. All changes in the middle ages with the rise of Christianity, as the early parliaments emerge and also the tradition of natural law takes shape. Likewise in our own times, the wider conceptions of human nature and of the nature of society inform all political thought, which in turn informs and shapes economic thinking.

A new series of books has been launched entitled *Sources in Early Modern Economics, Ethics, and Law*, providing translations and editions of works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries previously unavailable. Of particular interest is *Of the Law of Nature* by the renowned jurist Sir Matthew Hale. This work clearly counters the rationalist movement initiated by Bacon and Hobbes.

Grounded in the English common law and scholastic natural law traditions, it seeks to maintain the connection with tradition in which ‘justice’ is understood as part of the order of nature, and not merely a human construct, nor derived from contractual agreement. Hale directly opposes the notion of the ‘state of nature’ as ‘war of all against all’, though not mentioning Hobbes by name. This book offers a most valuable insight into the conflict of political and economic ideas that raged at that time, something usually passed over in the histories of political and economic thought. This new series aims to remedy that important omission.

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HGF NEWS

HGF BRIEFING NOTES

FRIDAY MEETINGS AT MANDEVILLE PLACE
The always popular Friday afternoon group has recently started studying *The Science of Political Economy* by Henry George, published in 1897. Anyone interested can attend; free of charge.

TALKS AND PRESENTATIONS
As has been the tradition for many years The Henry George Foundation continues to offer interesting talks and presentations at Mandeville Place in central London.

Recent themes include *The Opportunities and Dangers of Brexit and a Post Establishment World* and even more recently: *Henry George and the Laws of Nature* - A Talk by Dr. Joseph Milne.

All talks and presentations will be announced throughout the year on the HGF website www.henrygeorgefoundation.org

LAND&LIBERTY ARCHIVE GOES DIGITAL
Lastly: We are truly proud to announce that the full archive of Land&Liberty has finally been digitized. The archive is available to anyone curious about the history of land value taxation and economic policy in Great Britain, in the United States and the rest of the world.

Land&Liberty has been in continuous publication since its first release in the summer of 1894 under the original name *The Single Tax*. The magazine would later change its moniker to *Land Values* before becoming *Land&Liberty* in the summer of 1919.

Notable contributors throughout the magazine’s history include Henry George, Leo Tolstoy, Louis Freeland Post, Mark Twain, Herbert Spencer and Michael Hudson amongst others. These and other interesting contributions are now available online.

The full archive can be found at the Henry George Foundation’s website by typing the following link into your internet browser: www.henrygeorgefoundation.org/publications/land-liberty-archive.html

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No 1239 Spring 2017
FROM DELEGATED TO TRULY REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

People who live under a parliamentary system of government have expressed surprise and (to some degree) alarm at the election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States.

How, one might wonder, could such a person without any experience in government and with such a checkered record of personal conduct rise to the highest office in the U.S.?

The answer is found in the laws that govern the operation of political parties in the United States. It is worth noting that the U.S. Constitution is silent on the process by which primary elections and caucuses are to be conducted. The major parties have established a system of indirect elections, meaning that the votes received by a candidate determine the number of delegates to the party’s convention who favor a particular candidate. The delegates are only bound to that candidate for so many ballots.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, state legislatures began to pass new laws that reduced the power of party insiders to select the party’s candidates. The only general requirement to vote to select a party’s candidate who will run in a general election is that those who register as a Democrat or a Republican neither make a financial contribution to the party nor volunteer to work for the party in any meaningful way. What then, does it mean to self-describe oneself as a Democrat or a Republican?

The principles upon which the two major parties were established have changed over time, as have the policies advanced by the parties’ leaders. For most of U.S. history both parties were by any reasonable definition conservative. Neither party thought the national government should be very involved in the private affairs of individuals.

Only incidentally, did the Republican Party under Abraham Lincoln bring an end to slavery in the United States. Lincoln fought to keep the Union together, not as part of any moral campaign for emancipation. Once the period of Reconstruction ended, so did any commitment to equality of opportunity for African-Americans until the mid-1960s.

One might arguably conclude that little changed in any country until women obtained the rights to vote and to hold public office. The process was led by Finland, Iceland, Sweden and parts of Australia in the late nineteenth century. Only after the end of the First World War did the women of Britain and the United States obtain the right to vote. A few were soon elected to the national legislative bodies. Jeannette Rankin, a Republican from Montana was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1919 Nancy Astor became the first woman to take her seat in Britain’s House of Commons.

The presence of women in the legislative halls has certainly had an enormous influence on the scope and direction of public policies in many countries. However, even now women hold only one seat in five in national-level legislatures around the globe. The United States ranks ninety-eighth, behind Kenya and Indonesia. Britain’s ratio, at 22 percent, is a bit above the world’s average. And, of course, women are far from being of one mind on fundamentally important issues.

Perhaps it is time to rethink how we select our public servants. Our histories suggest (to me at least) that the citizens of every society would be better served by replacing elections and campaigns for office with the selection of legislators by lottery. Citizens who are willing to serve would be required to take and pass an examination that demonstrates competency.

One way to broaden competency would be to mandate that all secondary schools offer multi-year programs in civics to prepare willing to serve would be required to take and pass an examination that demonstrates competency.

As terms of office in the legislatures expire, individuals would be chosen at random from those who have passed their examinations. They would serve one four-year term in office, then return to their private lives to be replaced by another qualified citizen. Gone would be the enormous financial cost of electing legislators. Gone would be the influence of special interests over public policy. Gone would be the power of the political parties to dominate the political system for their own benefit at the expense of the common good. Delegated democracy would be replaced by a truly participative form of representative democracy.
...AND MORE AND MORE WEALTH TO ITS OWNER

Henry George, Progress and Poverty 1879

To find out more visit www.henrygeorgefoundation.org or www.landandliberty.net
Our Philosophy

What is Land&Liberty?

Land&Liberty, a quarterly magazine published by the Henry George Foundation, has chronicled world events for over 100 years. Dedicated to promoting economic justice along lines suggested by the American writer, social reformer and economist Henry George, it offers a unique perspective to stimulate debate on political economy with its reports, analysis and comment.

Who was Henry George and what is special about his ideas?

In 1879 George published one of the best-selling books on political economy ever written, Progress and Poverty. By the twentieth century the wisdom he expounded was recognised and supported by many of the world’s most respected thinkers including, Tolstoy, Einstein, Churchill, Keller, Shaw, Huxley, Woodrow Wilson, Stiglitz, and Friedman. Today, as the world faces environmental and economic crises, we believe George’s philosophy is more relevant than ever. But, as George foresaw in Progress and Poverty, it is inscribed on his gravestone: “The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured.”

Today Henry George is mostly remembered for his recognition that the systems of taxation employed in his day, and which continue to dominate fiscal policy in the UK and throughout the world, are unjust, inefficient, and ineffective.

He saw how taxes discourage wealth creation, positive economic activity and employment and prevent people and nations from realising their full potential. By ignoring property rights they involve theft and encourage dishonesty and environmental abuse. In short, as a method of raising public revenue, they fail. By offering an alternative, George also showed that taxes are unnecessary.

George realised that some land at particular locations acquired a value that was not due to the actions of any individual or firm but was due to natural influences and the presence, protections and services provided by the whole community. He saw that this value grows as the need for public revenue grows and is sufficient to replace all existing taxes. This could be collected by levying a charge based on land values and is commonly referred to as land value tax or LVT. However, George was clear that this is not actually a tax but is a rental payment individuals and groups need to pay to receive exclusive use of something of value from the whole community, i.e. the exclusive possession of a common, limited and highly-valued natural resource.

Henry George’s ideas were not limited to his proposal to change taxes. His profound body of theory also included issues such as: the difficulties inherent in the study of political economy, the fundamentals of economic value, a proper basis for private and public property, trade, money, credit, banking and the management of monopolies.

Key to ‘the truth’ that Henry George tried to make clear is that every thing is bound to act in accordance with the laws of its own nature. He saw that these laws of nature operate everywhere, at all times, and throughout a creation that includes man and society and the worlds of body, mind and spirit. Further, that people and societies can only behave ethically and succeed in their own designs where they take proper cognisance of, and act in harmony with, those natural laws.

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on __/__/__ (date) and then every succeeding ☐ month ☐ quarter ☐ year
and thereafter until further notice or __/__/__ (date) the sum of £_________

My Account No. ____________ Sort Code _________ Name of Account_________

My Name_________ Holder_________ Signature_________