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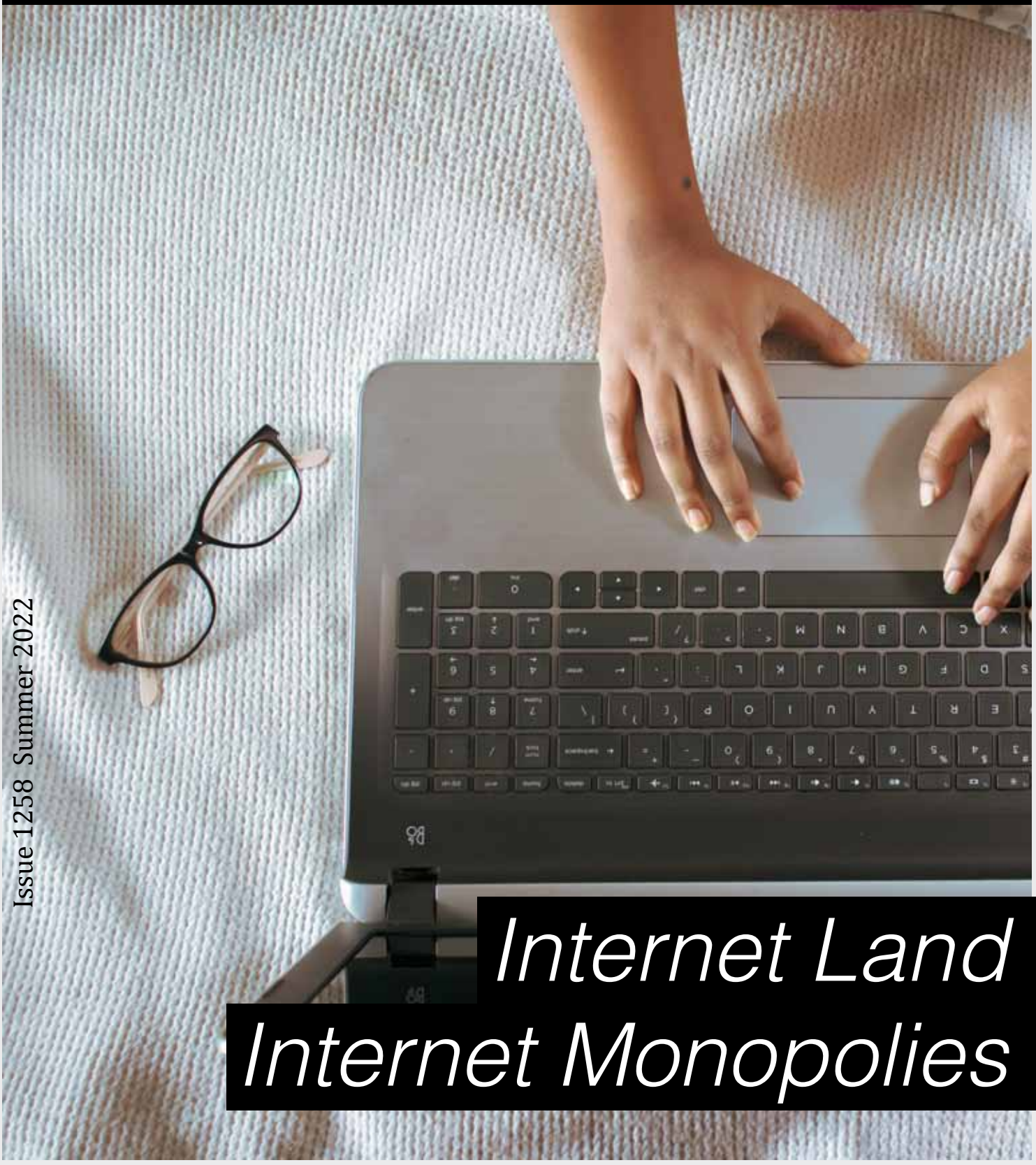

Issue 1258 Summer 2022

Internet Land
Internet Monopolies

Ω
Gavin Kerr
Planning For Justice

Ω
Jesper R. Christensen
On The Internet Monopolies Are Thriving

Ω
Toby Burtt
Highway To Hell

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The natural laws which permit of social advance, require that advance to be intellectual and moral as well as material. The natural laws which give us the steamship, the locomotive, the telegraph, the printing-press, and all the thousand inventions by which our mastery over matter and material conditions is increased, require greater social intelligence and a higher standard of social morals...

(as usual, the end of the quote to be found on page 19)

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message from the honorary president

Current issues over the affordability of household energy bills illustrate how essential but scarce natural resources and their value need to be shared. They also remind me of my experience as an engineer and manager working to provide affordable public water services in water scarce regions of the world.

In the UK virtually everyone has access to safe water and it costs a typical low earning household a small fraction of their wages to meet their health needs. However, in many parts of the world millions of people do not have access to safe water and where it is available it is generally unaffordable for typical low earning households.

For most people sufficient and affordable safe water is provided by a piped distribution system, but in water scarce regions flow is often intermittent and this gives rise to three important issues. First; contamination through seepage into leaky empty pipes. Second; inequitable distribution when, during service times some households extract excessive volumes via pumps and deprive others. Thirdly corruption and inequitable water charges arise as water meters become unreliable and readings arbitrary, so 'deals are done'. The 'Safe Water For All' (SWaFA) solution that I devised to address these issues uses drip or trickle flow technology to feed every household's storage tank such that, per capita, they receive sufficient safe water for their basic health needs. Then, according to the total water resources available, a limited number and range of enhanced/star flows can be auctioned at multiples of the basic per capita flow rate. In this way the aggregate value of discretionary water in that community is revealed. It excludes the value of the water that everyone needs and is distinct from any of the system's overall supply costs. Where it exceeds those costs it eliminates the need to charge for the basic service and becomes a source of public revenue. Where it does not it would simply reduce what householders on a 'basic' service would need to pay. The parallel of such an arrangement with collection of the economic rent of land as public revenue is interesting. Challenges that attend my SWaFA system include how many 'Star' services to provide, how many at each 'Star' level, and their corresponding flow rates. These have to be a political decisions and are likely to vary depending upon both the seasonal water resources available, local circumstances and the interests and powers of decision makers. Likewise, the permitted use of land and how its value is shared are political decisions that have a profound effect on the health and welfare of all people, where and how they live and earn a living and on the economic rent of particular land plots as well as the monetary value of the nation's land. With both water and land the integrity of the decision makers is clearly vital if economic justice is to be assured. This becomes even more problematic if those decision makers enjoy monopoly or near monopoly control and partial/commercial interests are in conflict with the basic needs of all.

At a global level the energy and climate crises reflect the same problem i.e. how may a scarce and vital resource and its economic value be equitably shared? Closer to home the energy affordability crisis has caused me to wonder if a SWaFA type approach might be useful. Smart meter technology would enable the tariffs for domestic supplies of gas and electricity to differentiate between a basic per capita rate and a progressive range of discretionary rates that would apply to households consuming more than their basic per capita amount. As with water and land there is a basic level of energy availability that is essential to a civilized life and meeting the challenge of ensuring this requires ingenuity, knowledge and devotion to truth.

David Triggs
Honorary President
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letter from the editor

It is encouraging to see there is a growing awareness of the commons. This is partly through good historical research and partly through the pressing question of global warming. Research has shown how the commons have been eroded through land enclosure driving populations off the land into towns and cities, usually creating slums. Here the desire for monopoly of wealth has displaced natural human populations, as though they were secondary to wealth creation. All this has been accomplished through discarding the natural law tradition, which holds that all is common, and replacing it with purely *legal* entitlements which have no ground in the natural world. By the seventeenth century one even legally owned oneself and became property.

But apart from this history now becoming popular knowledge, and perhaps raising all kinds of difficult questions about present arrangements, there is also the now unavoidable challenge of global warming confronting the whole human race. This is the direct result of our unnatural relation with the earth, with nature at large. The erosion of the commons is nothing by comparison, yet both spring from the same cause: the misuse of the gifts of nature and the unjust treatment of our fellow human beings. One brings about the other and really they cannot be entirely separated.

A vivid image of our unnatural relation with the land is given by Simon Winchester in his book *Land: How the Hunger for Ownership Shaped the Modern World*. In Chapter 4 'At The Edge of the World' he traces the arbitrary borders between nations and how they came about. With few exceptions these borders bear no relation to the natural contours of the land. They are artificial boundaries made through agreements, often after wars or disputes. For example the border between Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland, created by division between Catholics and Protestants and having no relation to the landscape itself. Or the boundaries between the different States of America, mostly drawn is perfectly straight lines, a purely geometric imposition upon the land bearing no relation to its natural formation. Simon Winchester traces the various treaties and the conditions of their signing which established these national borders. These borders do not indicate natural boundaries between communities who have settled on the land, which would relate to the nature of the land itself and its natural provisions. Through the rise of modern industry the land has been largely artificially shaped by exploitation for resources and commercial advantage, regardless of either land or populations. Land and people are secondary. And this situation, according to Winchester, is because the desire for ownership is the primary drive of the modern world. The human species has, so to speak, defined itself as property owner. This applies as much to the producer as to the consumer. They are one and the same person.

There is no doubt that this is an unnatural situation. It is unnatural because it abuses the earth and because it brings about poverty and a host of subsequent injustices. Yet it is perfectly legal. It is fully supported by treaties, international laws and state legislation. Jurisprudence itself has become deformed through the uncircumscribed quest for ownership. "*And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter*", as we read in Isaiah 59:14. That is to say, the modern quest for ownership is rooted in a fundamental misjudgement about the truth of our place in nature, and so "equity cannot enter". Modern jurisprudence is itself crippled and enslaved by a false conception of ownership. George himself argues in *A Perplexed Philosopher* that legalising anything to not legitimate it, and that law cannot make right what is against nature. Legislation cannot create ethics. On the contrary, it is justice that discloses what is lawful. This is not only something repeated many times in the Old Testament but is to be found in all ancient reflections on law.

This raises the question of the nature of the commons. There is a tendency to define the commons as that which belongs equally to all. But that is to define the commons in terms of ownership. Indeed, in terms of *human* ownership. But *ownership* does not apply to the commons. Our natural relation with the earth, the land, with nature, is not a relation of ownership at all. It is a relationship of *appropriate use*. The biosphere is not the property of any species. Contra Locke, I do not own an apple by eating it, any more that I own the sun by being warmed by it, or the air by breathing it. Nature is ordered by natural exchanges, not ownership. Ownership is a purely legal concept. That is to say, it can exist only through mutual agreement. It is because this has been long forgotten that modern law has been dominated by property law.

The commons, then, are not property belonging equally to all, any more than the sunlight belongs to all. Ownership is the wrong way of conceiving the commons, and using the notion of equality does not change that. So when George proposes that the land tax, after providing for all the responsibilities and duties of government, should be used for community benefits such as public libraries, parks, sports and arts facilities and so forth, we observe that none of these involve ownership, apart from state guardianship. They involve equal access of use.

A land tax seeks to prevent a *mutual benefit* from being misappropriated as *private property*. Even if the land tax were to be equally distributed to all, that would be to turn it into private ownership. It would cease to be a commons in exactly the same way as rentiering misappropriates a commons. Whether appropriated by one or many makes no difference. In other words, just as the commons cannot rightfully be regarded as anyone's property, neither can a land tax be rightfully regarded as anyone's property.

Once the notion of ownership is removed from the conception of the commons and from the land tax, then the question of what really constitutes ownership can be asked. It is clear then that it can only be the fruits of one's own labour. It cannot be a claim on anyone else's. In this way a right relation to the commons, to a land tax, and to labour is established. On this basis the responsibilities to community and to the natural environment can then also be stablished.

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ON THE INTERNET MONOPOLIES ARE THRIVING

This *Land&Liberty* article will *not* age well.

In addition to identifying some of the social and economic mechanisms at play when it comes to the modern internet I will try to paint a picture of where the internet – as we know it – is heading. In doing so I will embark on a road to almost certain future humiliation and personal embarrassment. As an example let me invite you to enjoy these particularly amusing predictions, which have not stood the test of time:

In 1995, Robert Metcalf wrote in the American magazine *InfoWorld*: "I predict the internet will soon go spectacularly supernova and in 1996 catastrophically collapse". Legend has it that Metcalf literally ended up eating his own words at a technology conference a couple of years later. Metcalf blended a copy of his column with some water and then consumed the – hopefully – tasteless smoothie with a spoon.

Also in 1995, the astronomer Clifford Stoll chimed in with an op-ed in Newsweek asking rhetorically: "We're promised instant catalogue shopping–just point and click for great deals. We'll order airline tickets over the network, make restaurant reservations and negotiate sales contracts. Stores will become obsolete. So how come my local mall does more business in an afternoon than the entire internet handles in a month?"

However, my own personal favourite comes from the economist Paul Krugman who famously offered the following prediction in 1998: "The growth of the internet will slow drastically, as the flaw in Metcalfe's law — which states that the number of potential connections in a network is proportional to the square of the number of participants — becomes apparent: most people have nothing to say to each other! By 2005 or so, it will become clear that the internet's impact on the economy has been no greater than the fax machine's."

Ironically, the Paul Krugman piece – from which the words above have been lifted – was rather aptly titled *Why most economists' predictions are wrong*.

BASICALLY CHAOTIC AND UNCONTROLLABLE

Let me point to one of the main problems in terms of successful prognostication at play here: On the internet everything moves fast. Partly, this is due to the simple fact that the internet industry serves as a magnet to young people brimming with ideas, creativity and ambition. The same type of creative person who would have tried to become a successful song-writer in the 1960's might very well be aggressively focusing that same creative energy into software coding here in the year 2022.

The lure of becoming the next important tech entrepreneur likely feels stronger than the lure of becoming the next Bob Dylan. Certainly, it looks more profitable to own a large internet company than a back catalogue of folk songs.

So, aside from these tech entrepreneurs, who really owns the internet as such? Who controls it? Luckily, the simple answer remains that essentially nobody does. The internet is by nature decentralized, dispersed and disorderly. In this way it is like most of human life, basically *chaotic and uncontrollable*.

A DIGITAL GLOBAL COMMON

This obvious fact about the internet often becomes clear on a political level when anti-democratic, authoritarian governments show their penchant for limiting citizens' access to it in times of conflict. Or whenever it pleases them, really. Most recently, the Russian government comes to mind. As a fine tool of oppression the Russian people have been cut off from Facebook, Twitter and numerous other internet services immediately following the invasion of Ukraine. As the *New York Times* solemnly wrote on March the 7th 2022, only a couple of weeks after the Russian invasion: "The actions have turned Russia into a walled-off digital state akin to China and Iran, which tightly control the internet and censor foreign websites and dissent. China's internet and the Western internet have become almost completely separate over the years, with few overlapping services and little direct communication. In Iran, the authorities have used internet blackouts during protests".

Much to the assumed great chagrin of tyrannizing dictators the internet has now started to become a supranational public good, it is becoming a *digital global common*. At least, if you are lucky enough to live in a country where you are allowed to access it. If you are this lucky, then with the internet you have access to this global common, a term usually used by political scientists to describe an area or domain not governed by any single political jurisdiction or nation-state. Another example of a global common is the high seas; even outer space can be thought of as a global common. In terms of the internet the comparison to the high seas seem particularly fitting in my view. You and I might be able to build a raft and start to operate on our own shipping route on the high seas tomorrow, but to truly benefit *directly* from this global common we will need to own something more akin to a gigantic Maersk container-ship. Similarly with large and powerful operators like Google, Amazon or Facebook effectively becoming critical internet infrastructure the parallel seems suitable. Still, the high seas – a historically well-functioning global common – is characterized by being both vast and without ownership.

Contrast this to the *dryer* parts of the world: From an economic perspective the main characteristic of land is scarcity and private ownership. This characteristic of scarcity makes land incredibly valuable when effectively monopolized – and some land will be more sought-after than other. When economic dominance and control was primarily related to agriculture the value of land tied closely to agricultural potential. Today, this is clearly no longer the case as modern, industrialized societies have moved further and further away from agriculture as its economic nucleus. The most valuable land is no longer the land, which has more potential to yield bushels of grain; instead it is the land with most service- and knowledge industry potential. In most cases the most central urban land best connected to modern infrastructure – meaning not only transportation infrastructure, but also high-speed, reliable internet access. This type of desirable urban land comes with all relevant social, commercial and sometimes even political benefits required to succeed and prosper in modern society. As we have historically moved from an agricultural economic nucleus to an urban and industrialized economic nucleus I am ready to ask what the next shift might be? Could the next shift be more digital/virtual? I recognize that it can't be argued that a person can live an actual life entirely on the internet. Any human is a physical entity that needs actual physical land to sustain a life. Rather I am asking if the future economic *nucleus*, as described above, could become even more *non-physical* than is the case today? With enormous advances being made in machine learning, in artificial intelligence and, simply, in data science, I don't find this to be an outrageous prospect.

HUMAN ATTENTION

If so, we must keep a very keen eye on actors in this new non-physical economic domain. When it comes to the most important internet companies today the concept of keeping an eye goes both ways. Having their eyes on *you* is fast becoming the entire business model. And what you are paying with might not only be your wallet, in some cases it might simply be your attention. This is not in any way trivial, though it might seem to be on the surface. In fact, I will argue that the best way to understand the most fundamental currency of the internet – as we know it today – is *human attention*.

It is often stated that *personal data* about user behaviour is the true internet currency today. The more I think about it, the more I am starting to view data as simply another layer *on top of* human attention. Before Google, Twitter, Facebook or Amazon can collect any data regarding your likes and dislikes – personal information which can later be rather effectively monetized – they need your attention. They need your mental engagement for as long as possible with whatever they offer. Whether this trade-off is worth it is entirely up to you to decide for yourself. I myself choose to use most of these online mega-conglomerates each and every day, and plan to do so many years into the future. And I am not necessarily of the opinion that you should have moral misgivings about your own usage, just know this: When offering their often free and even more often useful services these companies ultimately aspire to fully monopolize your attention. And so, in effect, your valuable time.

BUSINESS MODEL: BECOME THE MARKETPLACE

Another way of perceiving it is the following: One classic and simple commercial model is to sell, say, regimental ties to consumers with this particular interest and style demand. Another commercial model is to be the platform on which businesses interested in selling regimental ties *convene online* with potential consumers willing to buy. I am simply trying to convey that there is a fundamental difference between a corporation aiming to become the most successful *producer* or even the most skilful *seller* in a given market – and a corporation instead aiming to become the market*place*.

The latter is the lucrative business model of an abundance of internet companies today. It is sometimes referred to as the "online platform" business model. The immensely prosperous online retailer Amazon is perhaps the most pure example of this, the same can be said for its South American sister company named *MercadoLibre*. And an online service-oriented platform aiming to become the marketplace for drivers supplying a lift and consumers demanding said lift we have come to know as Uber. Perhaps you want to rent out your house for a few weeks or even months? There is an online platform for that too, AirBnB. The examples are countless.

Now, imagine these internet mega companies simply as digital versions of the most expensive properties in the classic board game Monopoly. But try also to imagine them with some crucial features added on top, which I will try to explain as best I can. In the board game the best plot is Mayfair, which will be the most expensive to both purchase and to develop. Mayfair will however also – to no surprise to *Land&Liberty* readers – yield the highest *rents* as the players progress through the game. Of course this is not unlike reality; a simple detail key to understanding the historic success of the board game, which can be almost instinctively understood even by young children.

In your own life you might have never walked on the actual street, Mayfair; or even spent a single Pound Sterling in a café on this prominent London street. In fact, I am entirely sure you can live a fulfilled, rewarding life without ever visiting Mayfair.

In the board game, however, the chances of you being successfully able to avoid this property are awfully small. This is akin to the reality of the mega companies on the internet. When is the last time you searched for something on Bing? Well, there is a good reason for that. In the case of internet searches Google *is* Mayfair – and you will be landing on it eventually – not because Google has become a de facto monopoly without facing competition as a search engine. In fact, the contrary is true. Google has faced many fine competitors, but it has become a search engine monopoly by creating the *far better* user experience relative to any of its competitors. But the added feature is that its monopoly status – or near monopoly status – becomes more and more entrenched each day.

It comes more and more entrenched by utilizing the following commercial mechanism: Imagine if you owned all of Mayfair, but in addition to receiving rents from stores, apartments and hotels derived directly from daily human life, interaction and commerce on the London street, you also received individual micro-level behavioural information about each human simply walking on your street. Well this behavioural data is exactly what you need to develop Mayfair into the most supreme plot of land – in absolutely all aspects imaginable. You will know exactly *how* to invest and develop it by means of this data, and equally important, you will know what to avoid investing in altogether.

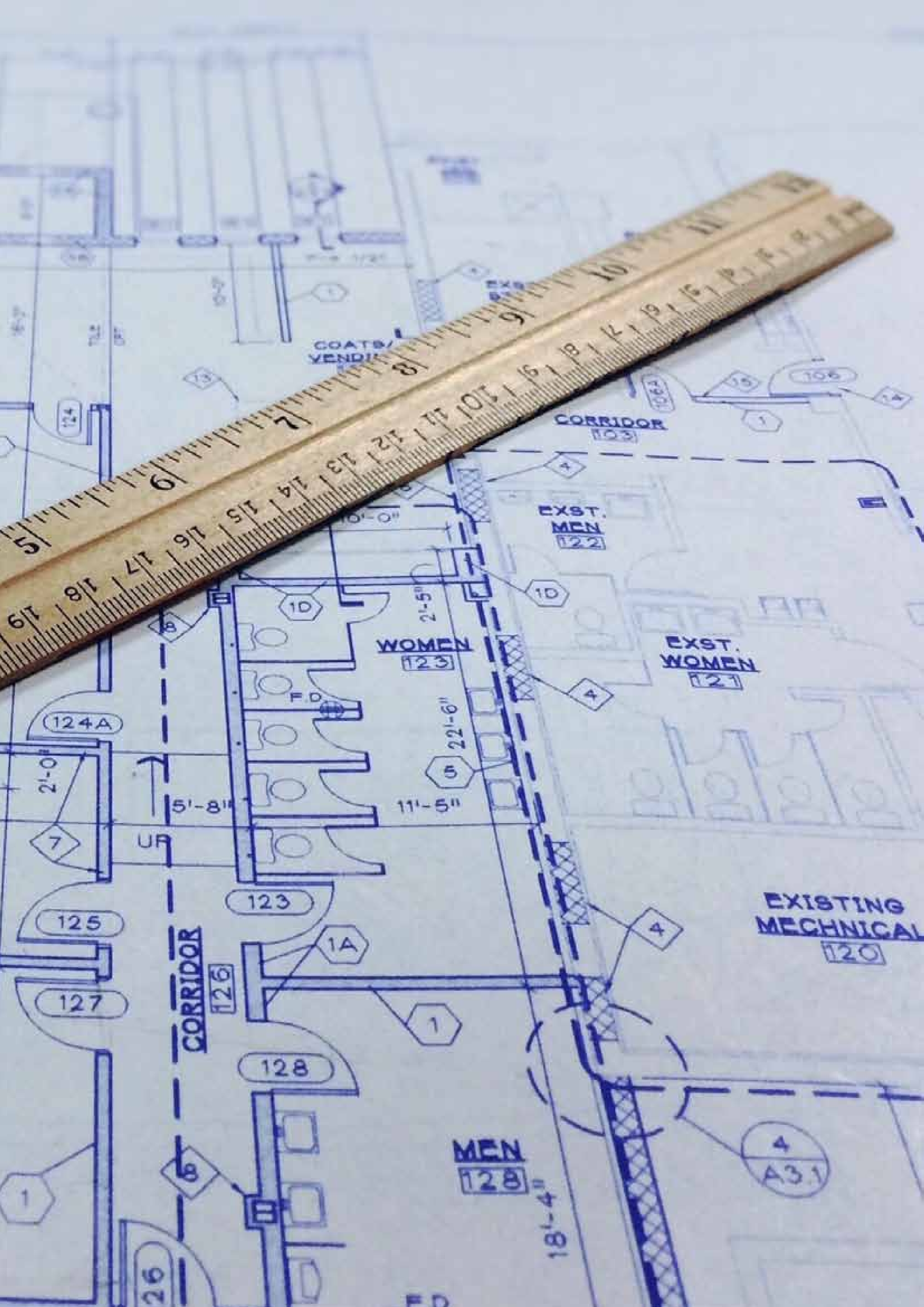
The reason why you never try to "Bing" anything is because the pure volume of data Google has gathered about macro-level search patterns combined with micro-level user knowledge about *you* has made the Google user experience simply unrivalled. And the truth is that Google's monopoly only gets better and better with time. In ten years the services Google provide will be even more precise and accurate in serving your every need. All Google requests is that you use it. All Google requests is that you *walk* there. All Google needs is that you give it your *human attention* the next time you choose to open your browser. It is a positive feedback-loop on top of a monopoly. It is a positive feedback-loop on top of Mayfair.

THE WINNER TAKES ALL

Remember those predictions made about the internet at the beginning of this article? Well, I am willing to make a similar bold prediction: Google will never be replaced as the primary tool for online information search. The same is probably true for Amazon, Uber and AirBnB in their own respective internet niches. These ships have all simply sailed. Every day Google becomes a tiny bit better and more precise compared to its competition, not to mention any future entity willing to try to compete as its future rival. They are all currently being pushed to the margins.

When it comes to internet monopolies the name of the game has already become *the-winner-takes-all*, and the barriers of entry to this market place only grow taller and taller with each click of your mouse.

Think about that, Paul Krugman.


CORRIDOR
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COATS/
106
1D
1A

Gavin Kerr

Gavin Kerr is an independent post-doctoral researcher. His work spans the fields of politics, philosophy, and economics

PLANNING FOR JUSTICE: LOW IMPACT LIVING AND THE ONE PLANET DEVELOPMENT POLICY

In the run-up to the 2019 election, the incumbent Conservative government made a number of key pledges to the electorate. One was to solve the long-standing crisis in the funding and delivery of social care. Another was to solve the housing crisis by stepping up construction to three hundred thousand houses a year, an aim which would be made realisable by a radical simplification of the planning system. The first of these pledges proved more difficult to deliver than the newly re-elected government might have liked: although a bill to deal with social care has finally been published, the government's 'solution' to the problem of funding has been widely ridiculed for its perceived unfairness and lack of ambition. The pledge to build more houses and reform the planning system has proved no less challenging: in 2020/21, only around 194,000 homes were built, less than two thirds of the election manifesto pledge of 300,000. More worryingly for the government, the Planning for the Future white paper, which was published in the summer of 2020, met with fierce resistance from traditional Tory voters, culminating in the Chesham and Amersham by-election defeat in June 2020. The delayed Planning Bill, which was to have been put before Parliament last year, has now been scrapped and replaced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, a much watered-down version of the aforementioned white paper. The key proposed planning reform, a traffic light zonal system which would classify land for either growth, renewal, or protection, has not surprisingly been abandoned.

In my view, the issue of planning policy reform – even if taken in isolation from the wider issue of the housing shortage, with which it is obviously connected – is no less important, and no less challenging to implement, than the issue of the delivery and funding of social care. In this article I will try to explain why I think planning reform is so important and difficult to implement, and how I think the problem could be solved.

THE NEED FOR REFORM

Some will argue, quite reasonably, that there is in fact no real need for a major overhaul of the planning system. After all, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was introduced to protect the 'green and pleasant land' of the British countryside, and in this, one might argue, it has been largely successful: absent from the United Kingdom is the endless suburban sprawl that blights so much of the United States, or the notoriously unpleasant houses scattered throughout the countryside of Ireland. Much of the opposition to the reforms proposed in 'Planning for the Future' came from those concerned that a zonal system would simply give the green light to the large property developers, often against the democratic will of local communities, leading to excessive development on greenfield sites without significantly increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Moreover, one might argue, again quite plausibly, that the chronic shortage of housing in the UK has nothing whatsoever to do with the planning system, and everything to do with the incentives generated by the tax system. After all, it is not as though there is a shortage of sites with planning permission for residential development: large property developers tend to maintain considerable reserves of sites which have been granted permission, and then to develop these sites at a pace that maximises profits, which is significantly slower than the pace at which housing must be built to make up the shortfall. Indeed, it is not even as though there is such a grievous shortage of existing housing, with a very significant number of houses across the country remaining unoccupied or under-occupied. In these circumstances, one might think that what is needed is not a change in the planning system, but rather the replacement of taxes that encourage developers to leave sites undeveloped and residential property owners to leave their properties vacant with a tax that encourages developers to develop and property owners to make their properties available to those who need somewhere to live.

LVT WOULD HELP - BUT NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM

The replacement of existing UK property taxes with a land value tax would certainly steer us in the right direction, and would probably be a prerequisite for a properly functioning planning system. Not only would it ease the pressure on rural areas by encouraging the utilisation of brownfield sites and vacant buildings, it would also reduce the incentives for speculative construction in rural areas, since a decision to grant planning permission for residential development would no longer in itself yield a significant financial return to landowners.

However, in my view the implementation of LVT would not make planning policy reform unnecessary. This is because with or without LVT, it must still be decided whether, to what extent, and on what basis those who desire to live in the countryside are to be permitted to do so. Most of us can probably agree that it would be a mistake simply to repeal the 1947 Act without replacing it with anything better, even if LVT were to replace existing property taxes. With no regulation whatsoever, it seems overly optimistic

to suppose that LVT in itself would restrain developers enough to protect the countryside. And given the probable continued absence of LVT, the retention of proper regulation of residential (and commercial) development is all the more important.

Under the current arrangements, however, far too many of those who have a legitimate reason for living in the countryside, or in rural towns and villages, are prevented from doing so. One reason for this is that the proactive, strategic type of planning the 1947 Act was designed to support has been gradually eroded since the 1980s, a process that has been accelerated by the austerity policies implemented since 2010, which resulted in drastic cuts to local authority funding for planning and development. But even if the central and local government departments responsible for implementing the existing regulations were not chronically underfunded and under-resourced, the legislation would still be too inflexible and too restrictive. A more flexible system would allow those who have a legitimate reason for living in the countryside to do so, without at the same time leading to excessive development and undermining the interests of existing rural communities.

I will say more about how I think the existing planning system could be made more flexible in the final section of the article. Before I do that, I want to say a bit more about what it means to have a 'legitimate reason' for living in the countryside, and why it is so important that as many as possible of those who have such a reason should be permitted to do so.

CONNECTING WITH NATURE AND LIVING OFF THE LAND

What it means to have a 'legitimate reason' for living in the countryside depends on what we mean by 'living in the countryside'. Living on the edge of a small town or village is one thing; living in an isolated house in the middle of a national park is entirely another thing. To live on the edge of a small town or in a village is to have the opportunity to 'escape' regularly and frequently to the peace, calm, and natural beauty of the countryside, whether on foot or by bicycle, or even simply by sitting or working in one's back garden. Those who live in large cities can, of course, make use of parks and gardens to connect with nature, and can travel to the countryside from time to time in order to escape from the constant noise of the city. But this is not the same as living in close proximity to the open countryside and being able to step outside into the peace and quiet of nature on a daily basis. In an era of high and rising mental ill health and chronically underfunded social services, the importance of the opportunity to live in a rural setting and connect with nature in this way can hardly be over-emphasised and should be restricted no more than is absolutely necessary.

However, the legitimate interest of those who desire to live in a rural setting must of course be balanced against a number of other considerations, such as the legitimate interest of those who already live in rural areas to have their say in the process of deciding whether and to what extent development is to be permitted. The traffic light zonal system proposed in the government's 'Planning for the Future' white paper has been criticised not only on the basis that it would generate urban sprawl and violate the hallowed green belt, but also on the basis that it would be anti-democratic, undermining local democracy and depriving communities of their right to approve or reject planning applications. A reformed planning system must strike an appropriate balance between the democratic right of the members of local communities to approve or reject proposed developments that would have a significant impact on their lives, and the equally important right to live in rural areas. If the members of local communities have a tendency to reject proposed developments, such that a significant proportion of those who wish to live in a rural area are unable to do so, then opportunities to live in the open countryside, where existing communities are less directly affected, should in my view be made available. I will say more about how this might be done in the next section.

Another consideration against which the interest of those who desire to live in a rural setting must be balanced is the interest of the inhabitants of urban areas who wish from time to time to enjoy the tranquillity and beauty of a countryside that is unblemished by (excessive) human habitation. The continued existence of such unspoilt rural areas was one of the main reasons for the introduction of the 1947 legislation, and there can be no doubt that this remains a central concern for a very significant proportion of the population. It seems clear, however, that this legitimate interest in the continued existence of a relatively unspoilt green and pleasant landscape does not justify the outright prohibition of development in the open countryside. What the existence of these competing interests requires instead is a procedure or set of rules and practices for determining when development in the open countryside should be permitted and when it should not be. This, again, is the subject of the next section.

There is one additional consideration which is of great importance and which further complicates what is already a complicated set of issues and questions – namely, the impact of development on the natural environment, both in terms of local ecosystems and in terms of larger scale issues such as global climate change. It is becoming fashionable to think of these issues from the perspective of a 'humans versus the environment' framing, with human society regarded as separable from the natural world within which it currently exists. From this point of view, environmental crises of various kinds can be solved by accelerating the separation of human life from nature, erecting a barrier between the two spheres, and in this way protecting the latter from the former.

Those who see things from this perspective tend to regard farming and food production as purely economic processes that should be scaled up and industrialised as far as possible. The 'efficiency' of such processes is then measured in terms of the quantity of food produced per worker involved in the production process, with vast areas of land and vast quantities of machinery and chemical fertilisers and pesticides consumed so that inputs of human labour can be minimised. The current tax system, which doubles the cost of employing labour while treating expenditure on capital goods like machinery and chemicals as expenses that reduce tax burdens, serves to reinforce and perpetuate this model of industrialised agribusiness. The same can be said of the system of agricultural subsidies, which are paid out to landowners in proportion to the size of their land holdings. A future in which humans are confined to urban areas, with the 'countryside' given over almost entirely to agribusiness or areas of natural wilderness, would appear to be merely the final destination in the direction of which western societies have been heading since the industrial revolution.

This (to my mind depressing) vision of the future of human social development can be contrasted with an altogether different

view, which seeks to identify ways in which humans can exist harmoniously with the rest of the natural world, not by separating themselves off from it, but rather by learning how to work in and with nature in a sustainable way. Those who see things from this perspective are more likely to conceive of farming and food production as social as well as economic processes that can only be truly efficient and sustainable when they take place in conjunction with other social and economic processes, such as waste disposal, energy production, construction, the provision of hospitality services, and so on. Efficiency is then measured not only in terms of the quantity of food produced per worker (although this is of course a relevant consideration) but also in terms of the quantity (and quality) of food produced in relation to all of the other inputs to the production process, including the area of land that is utilised and the carbon emissions that result from the use of machinery, the disposal of waste products, and the production and transportation of animal feed, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and so on.

Some of those who see things from this more holistic point of view are engaged – as far as current regulations allow - in the task of trying to develop more efficient and sustainable farming and food production practices, experimenting for example with permaculture, no-till, silvopasture, and a wide range of other agricultural techniques and practices. Many others of this persuasion are unable to engage in these kinds of activities because the opportunity to do so is restricted by the current legislation. While we cannot know in advance which experiments will yield useful results, what we do know is that the more limited the opportunities for experimentation are, and the less diversified agriculture continues to be, the less we are likely to learn about this vital sphere of human activity.

Although my own sympathies lie with the second of these approaches to the problem of environmental sustainability, it seems likely that it will be necessary to incorporate aspects from both approaches if we are to solve the problem of the environment and our relationship with it. The idea of maintaining significant areas of natural wilderness in which human interference is minimised is not in itself a bad one. And the intensive use of machinery and human labour to produce large quantities of cereals from extensive areas of land will surely continue to play a crucial role in meeting the nutritional requirements of an expanding global population. At the same time, the greater the variety of projects and the more opportunities there are for people to experiment, the more we will learn about what we are currently doing badly and what we can do to significantly enhance the sustainability of the agricultural sector.

This means that a just and effective planning system must incorporate elements from both approaches. One way in which the first point of view can be institutionalised in the planning system, for example, is through the establishment and continued protection of national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, areas of special scientific interest, and so on, and the strict regulation of any human activity that takes place within such areas (or even, if necessary, the complete prohibition of any human habitation within some of these areas).

However, it is far too extreme, in my view, to propose that we herd everyone into towns and cities, with the countryside remaining as a protected de-peopled natural wilderness alongside a small number of vast islands of industrialised agribusiness; or that we

create a countryside museum, with currently existing villages and farms preserved as relics, old works of art for the enjoyment of those lucky enough to be able to afford the time and money to extricate themselves temporarily from the urban areas in which they spend the bulk of their lives. A more balanced approach would surely be to identify, alongside the aforementioned national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty and special scientific interest, rural areas outside the boundaries of existing rural communities within which people can be permitted to live and work, should opportunities to live and work in existing rural communities be too heavily restricted by the democratic decisions of the current members of these communities. It would, in other words, be better to expand rather than to further restrict the freedom to carry out the 'experiments in living' on which the creation of a truly sustainable agricultural sector depends.

A MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH IS REQUIRED

Although the existing planning system is clearly far from perfect, and is in some ways severely dysfunctional, it is not entirely without any redeeming features. Some of the more obscure provisions of the current system could be expanded and applied systematically across the country in order to make the system flexible enough to solve the problems identified in the preceding sections. One such provision is the Single Plot Exception Site policy, which was introduced by Shropshire Council in 2009 to help facilitate the delivery of affordable self-built homes in rural areas across the county. The policy permits individual modestly-sized new privately built homes on sites that would not normally secure planning permission for open market housing, provided that those who will live in the home are in housing need, have a strong local connection and a need to live locally. A Section 106 agreement restricts the value of the property to 60 per cent of the prevailing market value, and the home is limited to 100 square metres gross internal floor area.

Another important provision of the existing planning system is the Rural Exception Sites policy, which exempts areas of greenbelt land from normal planning policy. Rural Exception Sites are small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. Permission may be granted for limited development in exceptional circumstances where a clear need for housing has been proven. As with Single Plot Exemption Sites, the properties built on Rural Plot Exemption Sites must be affordable, and only available to those with a strong connection to the local area. The Rural Exception Sites policy could be extended to Park (mobile) Homes, with the proviso that they should be open to people of all ages. Currently, nearly all Park Homes have a policy of refusing young people under the age of 50, an absurd state of affairs given the obvious role that mobile homes could play in meeting the accommodation needs of the many young people in rural areas who are currently living unlawfully in mobile homes, caravans, sheds, barns, cabins, holiday chalets, yurts, benders, shipping containers, and many other makeshift shelters.

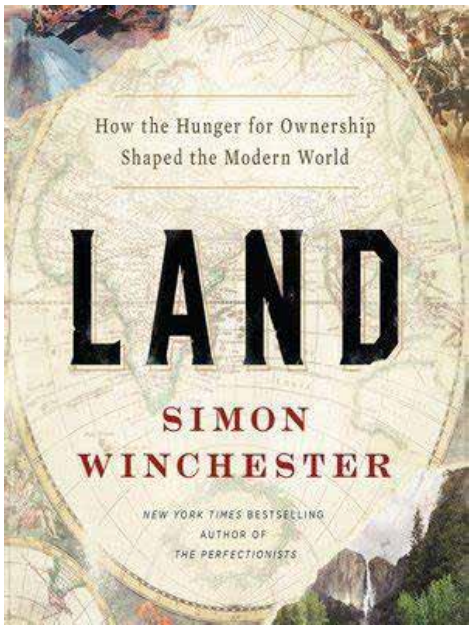
The existing legislation might be modified further by broadening the definition of "Essential Need" as a criterion for establishing dwellings on the same land as rural businesses. Rather than being required to show that on-site accommodation is "essential" for a financially sound enterprise, applicants could instead be required to show that on site accommodation would make the enterprise more efficient and/or more environmentally sustainable. This would allow agricultural workers to avoid the absurdity of having to commute from dormitory towns to work on a supposedly sustainable agricultural business.

Section 106 obligations are another important aspect of the existing planning system that could also be used to add flexibility to the system. Section 106 agreements are used not only to extract contributions from developers, but also to regulate developments (for example, by obligating developers to conform to a management plan), to ensure that the development is tied to a specific enterprise or area of land, or to secure affordability (as in the case of Single Plot Exception Sites). The government is proposing to replace Section 106 obligations with a consolidated Infrastructure Levy, which would be charged as a fixed proportion of development value above a set threshold. In some ways, a charge set at a fixed proportion of development value would be an improvement on the existing system, which lacks transparency and fairness. But the other important functions of Section 106 obligations highlighted above cannot be replaced by a levy. A better approach might be to retain Section 106 obligations and introduce the infrastructure levy in addition, or else replace the Section 106 obligations with a new set of planning conditions.

The systematic expansion of single plot and rural exception sites across the country could provide the flexibility that is so urgently required. Through the imaginative use of Section 106 obligations (or some other type of planning condition), the system would avoid further encouraging the construction of the ghastly identikit estates that have already been blighting both urban and rural areas for many years, as well as the kind of over-development that has destroyed parts of the countryside of Ireland. A combination of stringent planning conditions and a broader definition of 'essential need' would create more opportunities for agricultural workers to live and work in rural areas without giving the green light to greedy developers.

A planning system reformed along these lines might bear some resemblance to the 'One Planet Development Policy' (OPDP) introduced in Wales in 2011, providing the opportunity for those wishing to live within the planetary limits of 1.7gha per person to live on the land they farmed. The introduction of an English OPDP, also based on the Ecological Footprint concept, would provide opportunities and incentives for individuals and communities to dramatically reduce their environmental impact. The requirement to meet stringent criteria relating to livelihood, resource use, transport, construction materials, and so on, would ensure that only genuine land workers gain permission, while making such opportunities more affordable and accessible to those who are attracted to this way of life.

In this way, the planning system could be brought into line with the economic philosophy developed by Henry George in the late 19th century. At the core of George's philosophy was his insistence that all humans have a natural and inalienable right to the use of land and all that nature impartially offers (PP, 300), a right which can justifiably be limited only by the equal rights of others. It is clear that the effective protection of this fundamental right requires not only a just system of property and taxation, but also a just set of practices and procedures for determining whether and on what condition people should be permitted to live in areas of the country that society has decided to protect from over-development.



LAND: HOW THE HUNGER FOR OWNERSHIP SHAPED THE MODERN WORLD
BY SIMON WINCHESTER
Reviewed by Edward J. Dodson

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ISBN: 978-0062938336

The fact that this book by Simon Winchester has been well-received and praised by reviewers is one more indication that interest in *the land question* is on the rise. The author has produced a detailed yet accessible study of how we humans have thought about nature and over time embraced the idea that groups and individuals (at least some groups and some individuals) have a rightful claim to exclusive control over portions of the planet we share. The evidence he presents describes how what amounts to tribal identification and hierarchy within this tribal identification have dominated and still dominate our relations with one another and with the planet, even as tribes of people have over the centuries adopted new socio-political arrangements and institutions.

Winchester takes us on an historical journey around the globe, providing what most readers would conclude are important details regarding the migration of people from one part of the globe to other parts. For several thousand years now groups of aligned people have fought one another for control of territory and natural resources. With enough time every tribal society succumbed to the establishment of hierarchy and the empire-building ambitions of those who gained and held power. At the same time, history has been unkind to those outmatched in numbers, in the arts of conducting warfare, and in their adaptations to newer technologies. Most important of all where *land* is concerned, Winchester tells us, was putting pen to paper. First came treaties, then came expulsions. And then:

The newcomers, eager legally to secure the taking of the abandoned native lands, introduced one formality that their ... predecessors had never known: the title deed. Such a document ... soon became an essential for demonstrating that one was actually the rightful owner of a piece of real estate. [p.18]

And, with the first issuance of title deeds to individuals and to private entities, the treatment of nature as our common heritage was systematically and deliberately undermined.

Settlement in one place also created the need to establish boundaries, to support agriculture, to identify and provide secure access to locations for commerce, residence and governance. And the need to establish boundaries stimulated the introduction of new methods, new tools and new techniques for measuring and mapping the planet. Of course, at the end of every conflict over territory, borders were redrawn and maps revised. When acquiring more territory proved difficult or impossible, resources have been mobilized to add to the livable and usable land area by pushing back the sea, building levees, draining swamps, or terracing mountain sides. Nowhere has more been done to create what nature has failed to provide than in The Netherlands:

The Netherlands is essentially an enormous muddy delta, an amassment of flatness at the mouths of three great European rivers, the Rhine, the Meuse, and the Scheldt. [p.107]

In response, the citizens of The Netherlands have over many centuries contributed the money to fund expansion of the nation's dry, livable, developable land. Their plan contained one fundamental principle that, on the surface, distinguishes what has occurred in The Netherlands from that which operates in most other societies:

The state may have paid for all of this new land to be created, but it was not the state that ever intended to possess it. ...It is a philosophy underpinned by a spirit of cooperation and compromise and a determined lack of evident privilege and separateness, and a concomitant belief that all of the population could and should share in such rewards as state-directed projects might ultimately generate. ...New land would be owned not by the monarch or by the faceless official body that engineered its precipitation from the sea. Rather it would be owned by the best and the brightest and the hardest-working of the people who expressed their keen desire to own it. [pp.118-119]

Now, as someone schooled in the science of political economy as presented in the writings of Henry George, I point to the unfortunate fact that those who obtained title deeds to this newly-created solid ground (essentially, by George's definition, a *capital good*) were not required to reimburse their fellow citizens who were taxed in order to produce this highly productive capital asset and protect it from destruction by a returning sea. Considerable insight into what constitutes balanced and sound public policy is likely there for anyone who cares to study how revenue is raised to pay for the public goods and services brought to this part of the nation's solid ground territory. My own cursory research indicates that government in The Netherlands does capture some land rent but does so with no consistency across the nation. Moreover, as does almost every other government, all manner of incomes, assets and commerce are subject to taxation that imposes *dead weight loss* on economic output.

Simon Winchester ventures briefly into the realm of political

economy as he recalls the observations made in the seventeenth century by William Petty. One of Petty's important insights, Winchester suggests, relates to the operation of land markets:

[L]and's intrinsic value would also increase by the simplest principle of supply and demand, in that land was limited in supply but the population that wanted it would always be guaranteed to increase, such that the land would become ever more in demand, and so command higher and higher prices at sale. [p.133]

Of course, as Henry George explained, land would yield a sales price only if the community or the society failed to charge the holder of land the full potential annual rental value of the land held. Reading Petty directly from available sources, it is clear to me that he realized that the natural rent of land represented the value of a bundle of advantages associated with a location. Yet, for reasons he did not explain, he looked to other forms of income to fund the costs of government. Winchester offers no judgment on either the equity or the economic efficiency that results. In what is a very brief and passing reference to Henry George, he describes the great political economist as *"the celebrated inventor of the radical idea of the land value tax."* [p.393] Winchester adds a bit more commentary in a footnote, indicating some interest in and respect for George's line of thinking – perhaps to be explored at some future date:

In his wildly popular polemic Progress and Poverty (1879) the writer and political economist Henry George proposed that all taxes be abolished except for that applied to the potential rental value of unimproved land – what many have since described as the 'perfect' tax. Henry George had an enormous following in America in the late nineteenth century and his funeral in New York in 1897 drew the largest crowds ever then seen in the city. Few present-day economists could ever imagine such a send-off; yet his legacy has never found favor in any advanced country on earth, despite George's firm belief, supported by great numbers of thinkers, that since land is a near immutable gift of Nature, logic dictates that it is the only possession that should be subject to taxation. Too difficult to administer is the usual argument against.

Winchester may or may not be familiar with the wider history of the movement initiated by Henry George and the publication of *Progress and Poverty*. If the United States was George's homeland, his message found a most receptive audience in the British Isles, where the effects of centuries of rentier privilege and landlordism were every day experienced by the majority of the population. Born in England, Simon Winchester has intimate knowledge of the nation's history of the enclosures and the private appropriation by a few privileged families of the nation's rent fund. He writes:

As to how such families might have acquired their land, the stories are generally befuddled by antiquity and legend and have acquired a patina of long forgotten mythology. …These are the 'old' families of England, the landowning classes, gentlefolk untouched by titular reward, generally unwilling to be involved in such vulgar matters as politics or – heaven forbid – trade*, which might taint their social sanctity. [p.160]*

What he states here rather overstates the case, I submit. After all, Britain's landed aristocracy has for centuries sent the adult males of its most influential families to serve in the House of Lords, where they have well served the interests of their rentier and aristocratic class. The era of the sharecropper or tenant farmer may be mostly gone, but there is, as Winchester observes, huge incomes derived from what nature provides:

Anyone who sits on enough land is likely, thanks to the providence of geology, to have something of value underneath. [p.161]

Winchester then decides the time is right to offer the sentiments expressed by the great twentieth-century economic icon John Maynard Keynes. Would Keynes be satisfied with the public collection of rent to diminish the destructive effects of Britain's rentier privilege?

[Keynes] cared little for the gentry's argument that they were custodians of the land and creators of the landscape that was, in Britain at least, so uniquely and transcendentally beautiful… Keynes retorted only that he thought euthanasia the best solution for the gentry, the country all the better for getting rid of them. [p.162]

Some pages later he introduces readers to the statement made by a young Winston Churchill while campaigning in 1906 for a seat in the House of Commons, a statement few readers have likely encountered if they have little or no knowledge of the early Liberal party support for Henry George's systemic reforms and the campaign to see them implemented (significantly funded by the American Joseph Fels, who turned back the history of migration by becoming a citizen of Great Britain). Churchill managed to say a great deal in just one sentence:

Land which is a necessity of all human existence, which is the original source of all wealth, which is strictly limited in extent, which is fixed in geographical position – land, I say, differs from all other forms of property in these primary and fundamental conditions. [p.180]

As those of us familiar with the history of the Liberal party, opponents of systemic reform to Britain's land tenure and public revenue structure proved too strong. Churchill carved out his own, unique positions of political statesmanship as defender of Britain's imperial landed empire. Meanwhile, as the twentieth century progressed and long-standing empires began to dissolve, concern for how the land was being cared for began to grow in country after country. Increasingly, the interests and views of the earliest occupying peoples found a new level of public support. As everyone everywhere struggles to respond to the consequences of climate change, ancient knowledge of how to work with nature has acquired a new importance. A case in point, Winchester observes, is how the aboriginal people of Australia used controlled fires to remove the underbrush that, left in place, provided the fuel for the recent fires that roared across the Australian landscape. He provides many examples of how intentionally or not the heavy human footprint is being reduced around the globe.

There are many more stories contained in this book than I can cover in this review. If this book was available online in a searchable format, almost any term one might enter in the search line would yield results. The Index is eighteen pages long. I expect that this book will provide numerous opportunities for me to quote from Simon Winchester in my own writing. We are rewarded by the extensive research and travel undertaken to bring these stories to us. I hope the book will stimulate for many years to come the badly needed public discussion of *the land question*.

HGF BRIEFING NOTES

BOOKS WORTH READING

For an analysis of the present social and economic turmoil Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* offers profound insights. The modern conception of 'liberalism' is shown to be founded in a fundamental contradiction. In ancient tradition 'liberty' meant responsible self-government, both for the individual and the community. This involved cultivating the virtues of justice and especially of self-command or self-discipline, enabling responsible action towards family and the wider community. Modern liberalism, Deneen argues, is the opposite of traditional liberty. It is 'conceived as the greatest possible freedom from external constraints, including customary norms'. The only acceptable constraints upon this freedom should be through agreed laws, but otherwise the individual enjoys unfettered freedom.

'Ironically, as behaviours become unregulated in the social sphere, the state must be constantly enlarged through an expansion of lawmaking and regulatory activities', which gives rise to 'an ever-enlarging sphere of state control'. The same happens in the economy. The market that was once a meeting place in each city now expands without limit, in the name of the liberty of the individual, leaving the individual 'powerless and overwhelmed by the very structures that were called into being in the name of her freedom'.

By necessity the quest for individual freedom creates the need for more and more central state control to remedy the ills created by the demand for 'liberty'. The individual experiences disenfranchisement through lack of control over their circumstances, a lack of participation in the very society it seeks to establish in the name of individual liberty. Thus the modern conception of liberty, as unfettered freedom, turns out to be a fiction, an illusion which contradicts itself and the true ground of liberty which can exist only through self-discipline and practice of the virtues of justice and integrity in all dealings with society.

While Deneen does not discuss the private ownership of land, it is clear that the modern liberal notion of unfettered individual freedom to pursue unlimited appropriation of wealth underlies the abuse of the land and of nature's gifts generally, and so conceals the land question from view. Thus a Georgist reform of the land question is impossible within the framework of modern liberalism. Deneen's book helps us see the underlying ideological obstacles to implementing a just system of taxation.

FRIDAY MEETINGS

Summer is surely upon us and though a trip to the local beach does sound tempting, so does attending the current Henry George Foundation Friday Meetings.

All meetings will be held online (via Zoom video link) as we have now grown accustomed to.

The afternoon study group will continue from last term reading *Social Problems* (a collections of essays written by Henry George published in 1883 which presents his views on political economy and his vision of reforms needed for the achievement of Justice in Social and Economic arrangements).

If you stitch together page 2 and page 19 of the very magazine you are currently holding in your hands you will find a quote precisely from *Social Problems*.

The Afternoon Study Group will keep its usual timeslot from 2:30 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. This study group is still led by the very capable Tommas Graves.

Go to: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83880666680

Meeting ID: 838 8066 6680
Passcode: 544247

The evening study group will will continue the studies commenced in the Spring term. The study group have looked at most of the speeches as incorporated in the book *The Prosperity Paradox* by Dr Mark Hassed published in 2000 in Melbourne, Australia.

This summer term will begin by a consideration of the remaining material from the Mark Hassed book mentioned above.

Also, there will be time for further consideration of the UK National Accounts in order to reveal the benefits of replacing existing taxes on employment, production and trade with the collection of land rent as public revenue.

This evening study group will be presented and organized by the equally capable David Triggs.

Go to: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87944408537

Meeting ID: 879 4440 8537
Passcode: 60315

Toby Burtt

HIGHWAY TO HELL

The horrifying pictures of forest fires in various parts of the world shown by news media over the summers of 2021 and 2022 have been like scenes from the fires of Hell. The suffering and destruction faced by the people, the land and the environment in those regions seems deadly. There have been other natural disasters too, such as flooding and drought, and scientists have attributed these phenomena to climate change. Climate change is no longer providing subtle warnings: its disasters are happening now. The phrase *climate change* has recently been replaced by *climate crisis* by many concerned commentators.

Henry George spoke of an advancing intellectual and moral response to our "mastery over matter". However, it seems that humanity's attempted mastery over matter, through the use of fossil fuels, is in conflict with nature itself. Present international responses are manifestly inadequate and far too slow to avoid the kind of disasters that are already happening. The unjust exploitation of the environment has obvious consequences. It effects the poorest countries most severely where there are fewer resources to cope. For example, they have fewer weather warnings from monitoring stations. Climate fluctuations have always had an impact on the yields of crops with potentially fatal consequences for those in poorer countries who rely on this food directly. The fluctuations in the weather, caused by environmental pollution, impacts the very survival of people in these poorer nations. Henry George probably did not foresee the enormous scale of the negative effects resulting from the industrialisation of society and the indiscriminate use of natural resources. But he certainly did see that humanity's appropriate response alongside material progress should be intelligent and moral. He saw that industrial and social advance "demands the recognition of the equality of natural rights".

The present environmental crisis clearly shows a lack of justice towards those in poorer nations, putting in peril the whole planet. The 'natural disasters' we witness can no longer properly be called 'natural' since they arise through indiscriminate abuse of the earth. The complex question of what to do about it now arises. To change the course of the so-called material progress towards a more environmentally, socially and morally responsible direction will be costly and difficult for reasons beyond the scope of what can be suggested here.

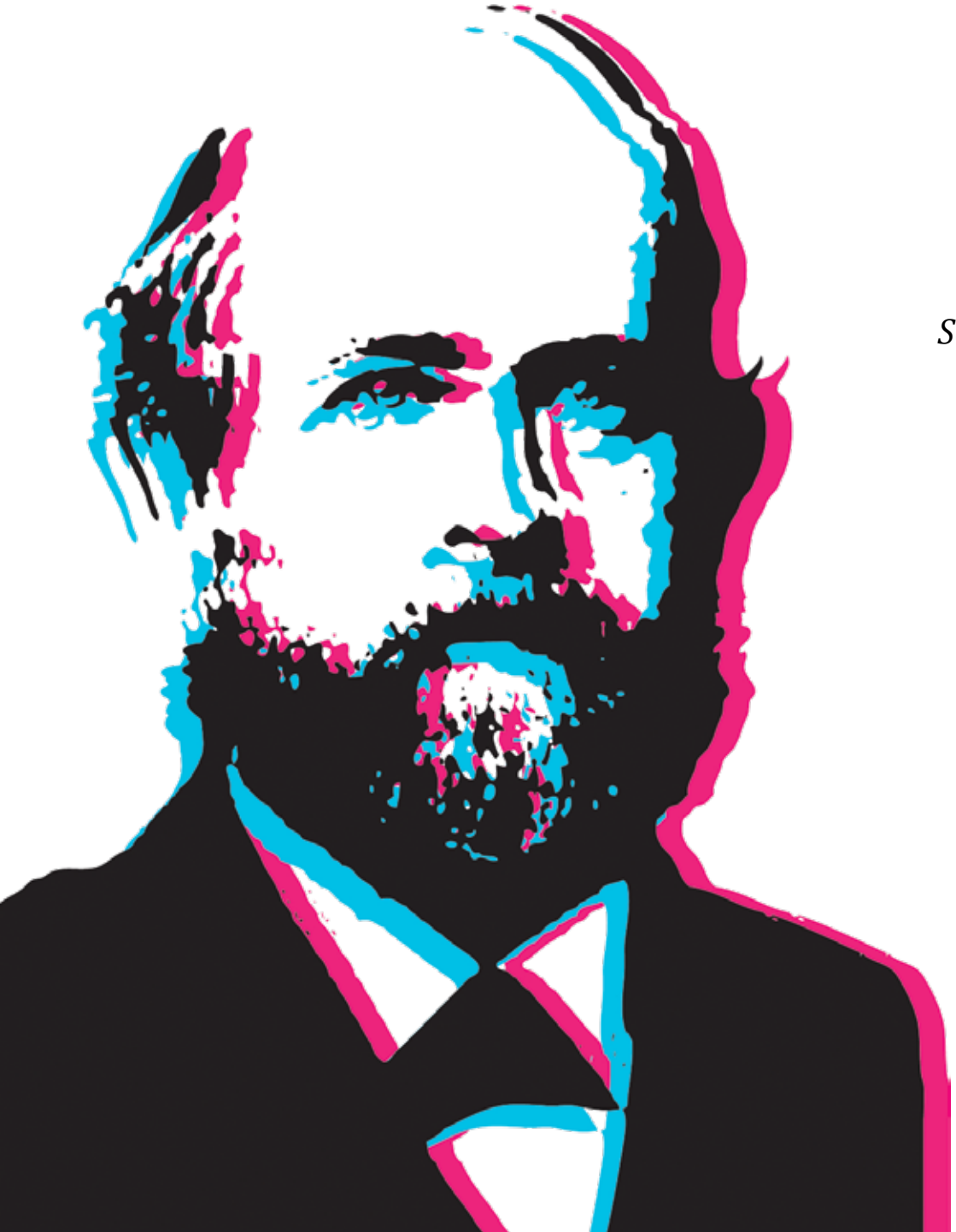
It would be far beyond my knowledge to suggest solutions that would have a global impact. What I do suggest is to follow the thoughts of Henry George and to seek "a higher standard of social morals." An intelligent and moral question to ask first could be, where can we start? Transportation reform seems to me an obvious choice. The high concentrations of diesel pollution in our cities is creating a wide variety of serious health problems. So to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads would be a good place to start. This could be achieved very quickly and easily with the political will to do so.

One radical yet entirely practical suggestion is to make all public transport free to use. With government investment this could easily be done. In many countries outside the UK, including some less wealthy nations, public transport has a very minimal cost for the traveller because there is a great deal of government investment put into it. In the UK there is proportionately far less government investment in public transport and it is prohibitively expensive, especially for less affluent people, those who perhaps need it most. Would it not be just and intelligent to provide greater mobility to those least able to afford it, while at the same time offering the public a way of travelling which could reduce the number of vehicles on the road? The clear advantages to health and environmental improvement would easily outweigh costs.

Around the world, ninety-eight cities and towns have made their public transport free. As recently as March 2020 Luxembourg made its public transport free. What would be the implications of making public transport free in the UK? There are many apparent and less apparent knock-on effects. We can only mention some here. The ticketing infrastructure could obviously be removed entirely, reducing the cost of running the service, and these savings could be used to improve the service and retain those jobs used for ticketing duties for facilitating the improvements. What could be the change for the users? The cost of travel to a city to work would no longer be a barrier when choosing to live further away from the city in cheaper accommodation. Would it have the desired effect of getting people out of cars and onto public transport? In places that have made the switch to free public transportation, the reduction of car use has depended on the quality of the service itself. In some places, car use has dropped very little. The cost of fuel, parking and congestion charges are a way of shifting usage to public transport through financial leverage. The reduced number of cars on the road would be a primary aim of making public transport free. This decrease alongside an increase in safer bicycle lanes would have a further benefit to public health through lower pollution and more accessible exercise.

A higher standard of social morals is what is required, and we need start to making such changes immediately. We could begin to live better, healthier lives and at the same time contribute to averting the worst effects of climate change through taking such responsible action.

...Especially do they make more and more imperative that justice between man and man which demands the recognition of the equality of natural rights.”



Henry George,
Social Problems, 1883

HENRY GEORGE FOUNDATION

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

Our Philosophy

HENRY GEORGE FOUNDATION

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 through 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, Huxley, Helen Keller, Woodrow Wilson, Stiglitz, Friedman, and Sun Yat-sen. 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*, and 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 constitute 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 the 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 these laws of nature as operating everywhere, at all times, and throughout a creation that includes man and society, and the worlds of body, mind and spirit. Furthermore, that people and societies can only behave ethically and succeed in their own designs when they are cognisant of, and act in harmony with, those natural laws.

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