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MISSION TO THWART AGE OF DARKNESS

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION has barely begun. Mikhail Gorbachev wanted to preserve the leading role of the Communist Party, but he let the genie of individual freedom out of the bottle too soon. Peking used the massacre of Tiananmen Square to demonstrate that it was not making the same mistake.

Boris Yeltsin was the human conductor for the frustrations of the past three generations, but he is not providing the inspiration that will create the character of the new Russian society. The people of Russia are now actively searching for a new identity.

But the West need not be complacent: we believe that, with the benefit of historical hindsight, the 1990s will be identified as the decade that saw the beginnings of a global transformation.

Peoples are quietly rebelling.

◆ In Europe, the nation-states tried to fuse their power into a super-state, but the politicians found themselves with bloody noses. Now, the scramble is on to redefine the role of the state itself, the legitimacy of which is likely to come under increasing question as people demand an honest devolution of power to the smallest possible practical units.

◆ In the United States, the Ross Perot phenomenon proved that people have had enough of slick talk and party machines: they want change.

Change is in the air, but few people understand how to creatively harness and direct the new discontent. There is as much cynicism about liberal democracy as about communist command. So is the world condemned to a freefall into the hands of a silver-tongued demagogue?

Could be; it all depends on the way in which fresh ideas are now developed through public dialogue. And, frankly, the pace must be set by the one worldview around today which chimes with social and ecological imperatives: the tenets associated with American social reformer Henry George.

The Georgist movement, unfortunately, has failed to develop the sociological and historical implications of its philosophy. For decades, it has sought to keep alive the idea of sharing the value of natural resources by advocating local tax reform. The full grandeur of Georgist philosophy was lost in the process, left to fossilise in its 19th century garb, leaving free all manner of intellectual charlatans to strut the platforms of the world in the 20th century.

Georgism is an applied philosophy that needs to be scrutinised by social scientists, so that policy-makers can have confidence in its relevance as the problem-solving tool they desperately need. Enough, then, of the municipal mentality. Have faith in a radical vision whose theoretical elegance, moral credibility and administrative practicality identifies it as the beacon of light in what is rapidly turning into an Age of Darkness.