

# LAND and LIBERTY

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Editor: Fred Harrison  
Editorial Consultant: V. H. Blundell  
Picture Editor: Keith Hammett

Editorial Offices  
177 Vauxhall Bridge Road  
London SW1V 1EU  
Tel: 01 834 4266  
121 East 30th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10016  
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## Beware crackpots

LIFE IS about choices. We make them every day when we enter a supermarket or choose which button to press on the TV set.

Occasionally, we enter into a collective decision-making process, as when voting for a government. Even less frequently, people are obliged to make choices that have epochal consequences, which shape the nature of the society in which they live.

Not everyone would agree with that. Karl Marx believed that, when it came to the large questions affecting political power and property rights, the average citizen had NO choice.

The dominant class, according to this thesis, controlled the very way people thought, thereby regulating their decisions in a way compatible with the interests of the rulers.

Marx believed he saw through that dastardly plot. And he concluded that the rulers could not override the march of history.

For Marx, it was only a matter of time before the excesses of 19th century capitalism were eclipsed by an enlightened socialism.

SOCIALISM has now been put to the test.

It is questionable whether the masses of Eastern Europe and China down to Cuba and Angola had much choice about participating in the Marxist alternative, but that would not have disturbed Marx; after all, the peasants and prols could not buck history, either!

Put to the test, and failed. Socialism is no longer a practical choice for those who feel that there is something fundamentally defective about so-called capitalism.

Millions of people died at the hands of the murderous Stalin and the misguided Mao, but perhaps not for nothing: we can argue that the socialist experiment has served a purpose.

The leaders of Russia and China now confess that the market mechanism is the superior way to regulate the economic process: the *planned* approach has failed dismally.

This lesson has now been taken to heart by the "social democrats" of the West, who in the past have experimented with a watered-down version of socialism. They are now searching for a new model, one which can somehow correct the excesses of 20th century capitalism.

Which is why, for the first time since the end of the last world war, people now have the chance to choose a new kind of society. There is no way to opt out of this process.

CRACKPOTS will undoubtedly emerge, in the next few years, to proclaim the new future.

Adolf Hitler was one such visionary, and it was the poverty of philosophy of the 1930s which allowed the maniac to be received as a saviour. There is no reason why it should not happen again, unless people enter into an open debate about practical alternatives.

We are optimistic about the course mankind will take into the 21st century. We believe that the time has come to relearn the tenets of the philosophy articulated by an American social reformer, Henry George, whose social and economic philosophy has stood the test of time.

We do not ask anyone to take the words of Henry George on faith: they have to be subjected to continuous scrutiny, as with any other system of ideas. Einstein could not expose any fundamental flaws in the essentials of the Georgist critique, but others may be able to do so.

But bear this in mind: while we are talking, the crackpots are plotting.