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THE STATE OF WELFARE: TIME FOR CHANGE

POLITICAL philosophers are in a bind. Right-wing ideology (as discredited by Reagan/Thatcher) is as much in retreat as the left-wing variety (as discredited by marxism).

We live in a system of economic chaos, and yet the debate on the need for a fundamental restructuring of society has not begun. Why?

The main stumbling block is the Welfare State. Few people dare challenge the Welfare State, the contemporary ikon of humanitarianism. Besides, the perceived need for it is as great today as it was a century ago.

And there's the problem: despite a massive redistribution of income through taxation, the Welfare State has failed to equalise the gap in incomes and life-chances, as Dr. George Miller explains in the *Land & Liberty* Essay (page 7).

The Welfare State was capitalism's answer to communism. It has failed, and the time has come to think the unthinkable - the need for a new approach to economics and politics that does not consign members of the working class or their offspring to premature death.

The Welfare State has lasted this long because governments

were able to accumulate public debt - their legacy to our children. Sweden, a trail-blazer in welfare capitalism, has a public debt that is now approaching 100% of gross national product, and is rising fast.

Thatcherism failed to dismantle the Welfare State because it had nothing to put in its place except a return to 19th century capitalism. Mrs Thatcher's legacy: a higher tax burden than the one she inherited from the last Labour Government!

If an alternative social system exists, it will have to be adopted with sensitivity. Vulnerable members of society must be protected while the new arrangements are instituted and tested.

That society can be visualised: it is based on the economics of Henry George. Unfortunately, scholars have failed to define in detail how we can transform the Welfare State into a society operating on Georgist principles. This means that advocates of reform will be met with mischievous objections by opponents who represent the rent-seekers. But the life-and-death story that unfolds in Dr. Miller's essay makes it clear that we cannot remain silent any longer.