



Profit For Our Planet

by Jeff Smith

Jeff Smith, a co-founder of California's Green Party and president of the Institute for Geonomic Transformation, has testified before the Russian parliament on environmental and economic issues. Until recently, Jeff Smith resided in Santa Barbara, California before recently relocating to Oregon.

If ideas like solar energy and organic gardening are more efficient, do you ever wonder why they are more expensive? It's because the market is not free. The playing field is tilted in the favor of the old ways, such as extractions vs. recycling and autos uber alles!

What are the levers shaping our choices? It's our tax and subsidy policies. What we have is not free enterprise— but capitalism.

We might have better luck solving our environmental disasters were we to quit paying for them. Tired of oil spills? Stop limiting the liability of oil tankers. Tired of nuclear radiation? Stop providing the uranium fuel below cost. Try to find a catastrophe that you are not paying for. Rather than tap the public, let responsible parties be truly responsible & pay their own way.

The unpopularity of taxes is well founded. As a burden, they discourage the very things society wants.

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Since taxes wipe out slim profit margins, ecological projects barely stand a chance. The wage tax prices out many environmentally friendly and economically sustainable entry-level jobs such as those in reforestation, weatherization, bio-dynamic agriculture, solar technologies. The capital gains tax directs investment away from the responsible technology to exploitation. The sales tax and fees adds to the obstacles of starting a new local business. From innovative recycling industries to energy conservation products to clean and green new approaches to building— all have their share of an uneven running start from the get go.

Now let's look at the other side of this tax business. Deprived of the power to confiscate private property, how would government fund the few valid social security services? The same way any successful business does: it would provide something people want then charge a customer's fee.

What are the most valuable goods or services government provides? It's not roads, or police, or schools. It's titles to nature, the deed saying this site or resource is mine. Charging full market value for this piece of paper is what makes taxation as unnecessary as it is inefficient and immoral.

In fact, if government were run as a profit-making business, it'd end up amassing a surplus. From this, like any publicly held corporation, it would have to pay its shareholders, we citizens, a dividend.

How much is your share of the Earth worth? Let's use Santa Barbara as an example? About \$4000 a year, which works out roughly to the cost of the location beneath your home. In other words, were we to pay in the annual value for the nature we claim, then get back an equitable share, those living in the cheap seats get back a surplus, the middle class breaks even. In a sense, for these two groups, their land is free, just as it was before the invention of civilization and absentee ownership.

Those who claim prime sites— cliffs overlooking the Pacific, dirt above potential oil fields- you get back just a fraction of what they pay in. Yet these are the people who can afford and who deserve, by excluding everyone else, to pay more. Getting a second income may be great for one's wallet, but what does it do for our environment? Take growth, the only way Californians can halt covering up the remaining open space is to use the already covered space more efficiently: devote less area to cars, more to people's living needs. This requires more and better mass transit and co-housing- novel ideas here but normal advances in places like Holland and Japan.

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These ideas take forever to become reality, and lose some of their conviviality when planned by bureaucrats who don't have to live with the results. A better way in our market system is to charge users for the costs that they impose upon others. Make drivers pay up front for police patrols, pollution clean up, and so forth, through a fuel surcharge or tolls or a mileage fee or some combination of the above and use the funds directly for that which they are earmarked (Again, not a radical idea— but integrated into the fuel surcharges in European countries). Make landholders pay for areas that they claim such as parking lots. Then the hidden costs of driving become apparent while the profit potential of mass transit is revived. More routes will appear as garages are converted into offices and workshops. Moving from local to global, the cause is hopeless unless geonomics does something to keep our species' number within the planet's carrying capacity. Zero growth is zero solution; the present mass of humanity needs no reinforcements for spoiling our nest. What's necessary is to take less Earth and to use it more efficiently.

Understanding the "natural heritage share" cuts to the root of our eco-crisis. It lets the New World work less, thereby cutting the use of raw materials. Enjoying more leisure lets us reassess our priorities. Consumers could move from a purely material definition of happiness to one embracing the emotional and spiritual as well.

In The First World, a second income lets families redefine old age security. Enjoying a citizen's dividend, they could breed less, thereby cutting demand for more living space and resources. Were the whole

world to take less and clean up its mess, we could at least reach eco-librium.

Let's get clear on our need to own land. Our territorial imperative strives not for absentee ownership, the speculator's road to riches, but for an owner occupancy, the Jeffersonian ideal. Thomas Jefferson also called for ending taxes on production while collecting a fee for possession of what none of us made and all of us need. Fairness to all owners mandates no confiscation of the fruits of our labor and no retention of the worth of our Mother— Earth.

Land value is generated not by owners but by neighbors who give value to the land or the value we put on nature and by population density or lovely vistas. But it belongs to all of us! Via Geonomics we can start heading to a more eco-friendly lifestyle and look to nature for our share of her market value- then forward to a society that prospers and conserves. Earthlings, unite! We have nothing to lose but our wasteful ways, for when we share Earth, we spare earth.