

EARTH DAY 1981 was internationally celebrated on March 20, the Spring Equinox when day and night are of equal length everywhere on the globe. The first Earth Day was celebrated in San Francisco in 1970, the brainchild of John McConnell and his Earth Society Foundation. Since then, Earth Day has gained wide recognition. This year in San Francisco, Mayor Dianne Feinstein, at the urging of the World Citizens Assembly, proclaimed March 20 as World Citizens Day. She encouraged "all citizens to participate in the festivities linking people of our city to people of all the earth, acknowledging our common humanity."¹ The World Citizens Assembly is a non-governmental organisation that works in cooperation with the United Nations.

At the United Nations in New York, the Peace Bell was rung at 12.30 p.m., the exact moment of the Equinox. Several persons spoke to the outdoor assembly, including UN Ambassador Arvid Pardo of Malta, the "father" of the Law of the Sea Treaty, and John McConnell.

McConnell and Pardo were also among the guest speakers at "Economics of Peace: An Earth Day Conference" held at the Henry George School of Social Science, located not far from UN headquarters. McConnell pointed out that humanity is at a point in its evolution when it must decide to "grow up or blow up!" He related how, looking to the past as well as to the future, he based his choice of the Equinox for Earth Day on the ancient Earth-culture of Stonehenge, which was built to mark the occurrence of the Equinox and other astronomical phenomena.

One of the tools used by McConnell's Foundation to promote Earth Day is the *Earth Charter*.² Its preamble opens with the statement that

We are the first generation to determine the life or death of the planet we have inherited. The care of Earth is now our most important task . . . We believe that a vigorous united effort to understand, protect and revive our planet will at the same time promote mutual trust and accommodations needed for creating a peaceful future.

The Charter goes on to outline its principles of "Earth Care," "Earth Rights," "Stewardship," and "Guidelines for Action." It urges the development of technologies "that will increase rather than destroy Earth's renewable bounty."

A detailed exposition of the principles of Earth Rights is found in the Foundation's *Planetary Inheritance*

EARTH DAY:

Declaration.³ The *Declaration's* central point is

That among the equal rights of men is the right to an equal share in nature's bounty; a right of each man to his planetary inheritance . . . No one can, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity, or any other man's posterity, of the right to his portion of Earth. All natural resources belong equally to every living person . . . To this end each nation should collect a two per cent royalty each year for all use (including its own) of any land or other resources. These royalties would be based on the selling price of the natural Earth materials sold or used. These royalties would be separate from taxation for government needs, and be distributed equally to all citizens . . . In this way within a fifty-year life span there would be full and just compensation to each person for any use of his portion of Earth's natural riches.



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The *Declaration* extends this principle to the use of the sea and sea floor: the royalties from such uses would be collected by the United Nations and distributed equally as with the other royalties. The difference among nations relative to natural resources could be further equalized via a global Natural Resource Royalties Pool. The *Declaration* also recognises that

The benefits of nature's bounty can only be realised through man's constructive effort and the wise use of his accumulated knowledge . . . Therefore, no individuals, or groups, should be deprived of any just benefits obtained from the industrious use of Earth's resources, so long as they meet their obligations to Earth and Earth's people.

These obligations, according to the document, include the payment of the two per cent royalty and non-pollution of the environment. Polluters would forfeit their right to receive royalties for specified periods of time, depending on the damage done.

PARALLELING the developments of Earth Day, from small obscure beginnings to international recognition, is that of the Law of the Sea Treaty. For 12 years the UN has been seeking to draw up a legal framework within which all people can conduct activities within the marine environment. Ambassador Pardo, who first proposed the idea, traced the development thus far, going back to the early legal status of the sea. While there had been attempts by powerful governments to claim the sea as their own (e.g., the Pope at one time divided ownership of all ocean water between Spain and Portugal), it has been generally accepted that, in the words of the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, "the sea is free", i.e., beyond the jurisdiction of any nation-state.

Modern times have seen the eroding of this principle. The discovery of off-shore oil in the '40s led US policy makers to claim a "contiguous zone" which extended national jurisdiction beyond the traditional three miles to 12 miles out from shore. This trend has continued, with other nations following suit and escalating the claims. Today only 40 per cent of the marine environment remains unclaimed.

It was to halt this trend towards total nationalisation of the ocean that led Pardo to develop the concept of the Law of the Sea. Under the proposed draft treaty, the UN would create a Seabed Authority to oversee and manage the exploitation of undersea fisheries and such resources as hydrocarbons, algae, petroleum and manganese. The waters above the international seabed (the unclaimed 40 per cent) would remain "high seas", i.e., free for all to navigate upon.

The draft treaty is currently being held up for review and possible rejection by the Reagan Administration. Parts of the draft treaty propose mandatory transfer of financing and technology from those willing and able to mine the ocean floor to the Seabed Authority. The US and other industrialised nations see this as a form of taxation imposed on their citizens for the benefit of "Third World dictatorships."⁴ And there are

2% royalty plan for sharing resources

other unresolved issues: the use of the sea for military purposes; conflicts of interest between coastal and inland states; and whether or not the revenue collected by the Seabed Authority should be divided among all nations according to some formula, or used by the Authority itself to finance and extend its own operations (the method advocated by Pardo).

IN HIS address to the conference, Robert Clancy, president of the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade, stressed the ethical imperative underlying the need for reforms that implement the idea of "common heritage". He used some basic statistics to bring home his point. The total surface of Earth is 196,938,000 square miles (with 640 acres per sq. mile), the total dry-land area being 57,500 square miles. With 4.1 billion people inhabiting the globe, the dry-land could be divided into 36 acre lots per family of four.⁵

Of course, since land is not of equal quality, situation or value, and since some people require more or less land than others, it would be impossible to divide up Earth equitably among all people. Yet there is a solution, said

Clancy, and that is to take the rental values that attach to sites and resources and distribute them in equal shares to every person. This could be done on a global level, as proposed by the Planetary Inheritance Declaration or the Law of the Sea; on a regional level, as proposed in Alaska and practised in Alberta; or on a local level, via a "single tax" on land-values as proposed by Henry George.

An alternative voluntarist method of land reform, the community land trust, was detailed by Dan Sullivan of the Henry George Foundation. The land trust, of which there are over thirty in operation in the US, is a legal entity that acquires land by gift or purchase. The land is then leased out in parcels to tenants, but it is never again sold or otherwise taken out of "trust." The rent collected by the leases is used to defray property taxes and other community expenses, with any surplus distributed as dividends to the original "investors" in the trust, or to the tenants themselves.

The voluntarist spirit was manifest in several of the other guest speakers at the Conference, as well as in many of the participants among the audience. Conference co-ordinator

Mildred J. Loomis of the decentralist School of Living, Jack Schwartzman, editor of the individualist quarterly *Fragments*, and Mark Brady of the Students for a Libertarian Society, each criticised militarism and governmental intervention.

ONE OF THE more controversial speakers was Kirkpatrick Sale, noted author of *Human Scale*. Speaking on the advantages of localism and appropriate technology, Sale also correlated peace and decentralism by using statistics showing that, throughout history, periods of inflation and periods of war coincide with periods of growth of the large-scale nation-states.

The evils of nationalism were also criticised by Dr. Harry Lerner of the World Citizens Assembly. According to Dr. Lerner, a world economy geared to the production of nuclear armaments, to the detriment of both the taxpayers and real human needs, now poses the grave threats of "omnicide, the killing of us all; and terricide, the killing of the Earth." And the present costs of the mis-allocation of financial and agricultural resources (into the hands of military and corporate elites, both in industrial and developing countries) was outlined in Lynn Stone's talk on the world crisis in food production.

While the problems presented were apparent and interrelated, the solutions presented sparked much discussion and disagreement among the conferees. Not all could accept the desirability of nuclear disarmament, or of governmental measures to effect more equitable access to land and natural resources. Anti-statists shared the platform with world-governmentalists. There was, however, a general agreement that what is good for planet Earth is also good for the individual human being. A world at peace would be one where each individual had access to Earth on an equal basis with others, where special privileges and destructive powers had been eliminated, allowing global cooperation to flower and transcend the artificial barriers of political geography and ideology.

REFERENCES

1. The "Proclamation" was published and distributed by the Henry George School, 833 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.
2. Published by the Earth Society Foundation, 919 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022.
3. As above.
4. Prof. Karl Brunner, reported in *Fortune*, April 6, 1981.
5. Statistics from *The Heritage of Earth*, Dr. Samuel Scheck, Woodbury, NY.

Do rent controls curtail house building?

TWO HUNDRED U.S. cities enforce rent control or stabilisation schemes.

These are designed to protect low-income families from unbearably high rents at a time of a general shortage of property to let.

The Senate Banking Committee has now urged that these controls should be eased. If the cities - including New York and Washington - refuse, they could be denied Federal housing funds.

For President Reagan's Administration believes that rent controls are responsible for the shortage of rentable housing. Many landlords, it is argued, have allowed property to run down because the controls deny them a reasonable return on their investments.

Ian Barron writes: There is a superficial plausibility in this argument, but it is

wrong. It puts the cart before the horse.

Obviously, investors require a competitive return on their capital. But the rising price of land is the major reason why the house-building industry is not able to match the demand for privately-owned homes.

Historically, as building gathered momentum - pushing up output in response to demand - the speculators moved in to capitalise on the community's needs. This forced land prices above realistic levels: people could not afford the prices which the builders were forced to charge. This, then, resulted in a cut-back in construction.

House-building cycles - slumps following booms - are a well-documented phenomenon, and they are not evidence that the demands of families for

homes have been periodically met to their complete satisfaction!

So, families have had to resort to renting their accommodation. But rents, rising along with the sale price of land, forged ahead of pay packets. This caused distress, and resulted in the widespread demand for action.

Traditionally, political action has been myopic: rent controls - which then do, indeed, discourage investors!

The source of the problem, however - the monopoly price of land, and artificial restraints on its supply - is effectively ignored by those who shape policies in Washington.

Why? Because the politicians (and the lobbyists) have failed to make the land issue an electorally important one.