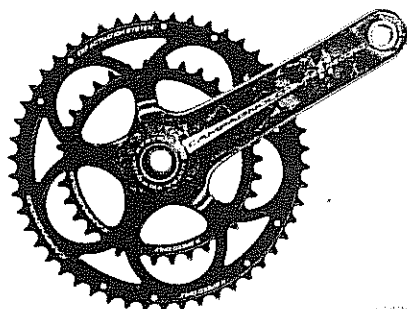


# 50 GEOISTS IN HISTORY

TIMELESS, UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES CONTINUALLY BEING REDISCOVERED:

By Karl Williams



**“a crank is a little thing that turns and makes revolutions”**

Critics of our movement often like to portray us as cranks, a fringe group or a hero-worshipping cult dedicated to the Master, Henry George. This is one of the reasons I usually avoid the term “Georgist”, whereas “geoist” has that timeless feel, which suggests the bedrock of our Earth (geo) just as our economic system rests on a bedrock of unassailable principles.

A glance at the table of Geoists in History which I’ve penned over the last 9 years will quickly demolish any notions that we are somehow dependent on the thoughts of one man. Here assembled (and there are dozens more mighty figures in the Progress pipeline) include some of the greatest thinkers in history, spread over centuries and from lands far and wide. If we are to be labeled as cranks, then I’ll take Henry George’s observation that ‘...a crank is a little thing that turns and makes revolutions’!

This universality is what gives our world view such deep appeal. That is, wherever land is misappropriated for personal gain (in perpetuity, according to those silly pieces of parchment known as Land Title Deeds!) then economic

lethargy – if not ruin – will surely follow. Put another way, if the wealth that accrues to land isn’t collected for the national treasury, then it will instead be diverted into the pockets of the landowners thus setting up an economic system which drives efforts towards speculation and boom-bust cycles and a tax system which “fines” those who make honest efforts to create wealth and employ others.

But universal principles should apply to the whole universe, shouldn’t they? Far distant planets would always have locations which are better or worse situated in terms of accessibility to markets & services, natural advantages (climate, natural resources etc.) and so on, no matter how many heads were wobbling on their alien bodies. It is impossible to imagine any landscape or population distribution where all parts of the planet – whether on the surface, underground or defying gravity – are equally desirable. Meanwhile, back on planet Earth, if politics allowed it, nations with greater natural advantages (climate, minerals, location etc.) should pay proportionally more into a world fund to help equalise the disadvantages suffered by those whose accident of birth landed them on the wrong side of an (arbitrary, often) national border. Zooming in to a smaller scale, intentional communities or communes aren’t all sharing equally if those nearest the river, the sunniest spot, the road into town, the communal infrastructure & equipment or the best soil don’t apply our geoist principles in order to share the communally-occupied property in a meaningful way among members.

Pig-ignorant critics also like to portray us as being hung up on land in the narrow agricultural sense of that word, branding our proposals as belonging to

a bygone rural age. Our great Geoists in History have mostly discovered geoist principles for themselves rather than having it taught to them, and they have reiterated time and again that it is the **locational** (c.f. agricultural) value of land that is referred to. Yet we have to repeatedly deal with howls of protest that our “land tax” would unfairly punish the poor old farmer!

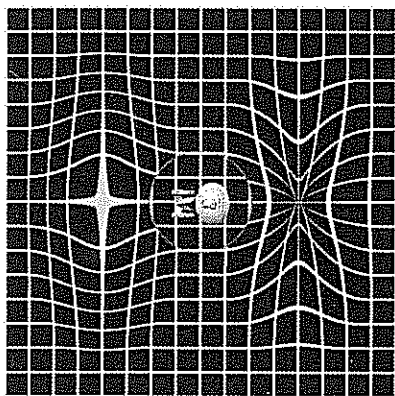
Furthermore, we can also claim to be the proto-environmentalists, for our scheme does not simply apply to locational land but to all natural resources – minerals, water, the electromagnetic spectrum, logging rights, fishing rights, aircraft landing slots etc. Extending further, it’s not just the **use** of natural resources on which we’re based, but also the **abuse** – hence the need for charges on pollution of air, water, soil, the gene pool, our climatic system etc. Henry George had written more about our world view that anyone else up to that point in history, but pollution wasn’t an apparent problem then nor did the population at the time give rise to the scarcity value that nowadays we experience with things like water.



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How can religions claim to give us a fair and practicality code for living together if they fail to deal with the land question? It's not good enough to espouse motherhood statements like "Thou shalt not steal" (well, duh!) without identifying what is one's own and what properly belongs to society at large. In the same manner, philosophical perspectives that dwell on fairness, equity and virtue should deal squarely with the nature of property, for we believe that natural resources are distinctive insofar that they should be shared equally through natural resource charges and that what has been produced through one's own labour should not be subject to confiscation by the state.

Similarly, every single non-geoist economic system has failed, and all our think-tanks, political policy makers and economics professors are demonstrably lost for answers to entrenched problems such as unemployment, boom-bust cycles and growing disparities of wealth. I used to write my economic travelogues years ago from some of the 80 or so countries I've tramped around, especially the less-visited places such as Yemen, Uganda, Bolivia and, Ethiopia. On the one hand, most of these far-flung nations had cultural traditions that somehow respect the principle that natural resources should not be bought and sold



Let's fast-forward, then, at warp speed to 100 billion years A.D. when humanity (if our expression of life then even vaguely resembles the human form) has continued to blunder on from one economic crisis to a million more

and profited from, and that somehow land and natural resources should remain common property. However, for reasons I've not fully fathomed, they've all ended up with economic systems which allow land to be bought outright, in perpetuity and with little or no site rent paid back into the communal coffers. So my correspondent's reports, after describing how absorbing were the cultural perspectives, used to invariably arrive at the same conclusion about the needless poverty and inequality so clearly visible: That the "Law of the Land" can only be ignored at one's peril, no matter what religion, tradition, topography or philosophical perspective.

Strangely, the extremely-long term view of our hopes of geoist implementation is quite hopeful, if not 100%. It might take hundreds of thousands of years ... or millions of years ... or billions of years, even. Let's fast-forward, then, at warp speed to 100 billion years A.D. when humanity (if our expression of life then even vaguely resembles the human form) has continued to blunder on from one economic crisis to a million more. Civilisation, so-called, has continued to experience wars, social problems, grinding poverty in the face of technological advancement and squandering of natural resources (will we be the descendants of the breeding pairs who colonised the relatively cool polar regions?).

So here we are, 100 billion years down the track, and the planets economic systems are still lurching from one crisis to another (of a kind that would be recognisable to us today). Another world congress is convened where the chairperson finally bangs the table and declares, "Look! We've tried every single variation of capitalism, socialism, anarchism, communism, religious communalism, individualism, tribalism and everything under the Sun not once, but at least 10,000 times each. We have no choice, for everything else is a proven failure – we have to shift taxes off labour and capital and onto land and natural resources."

But how did this far-distant world congress know of this alternative form of economics? It is surely possible that no copy of Henry George's *Progress & Poverty* survived. The answer is written in the table of 50 Geoists in History – there was never a time when people with half a brain didn't think for themselves and realise that it's plain wrong to own land in the way we do at present.

There will always be people – famous and humble alike – who'll rediscover "our" system of taxation and land tenure. I've had the great privilege to meet a few souls who figured out geoist principles totally unassisted and then stumbled upon our organisation and were chuffed to discover that there's an organisation already established to advance "their" theory! It doesn't matter how one might try to explain it, the fact is that it happens, indisputably – that is, people "discover" geoist principles independently throughout history, without regard to race, culture, gender or education. It might be said, however, that a good education – especially one that confers the ability to think for oneself – is a definite advantage in nutting out geoist economics independently.

It should also be recognised that there's frequently been political pressure on people to not broadcast their geoist views, for those in power will naturally attempt to preserve the status quo. When Henry George was riding a wave of huge popularity in the late nineteenth century in the US, the private paymasters of universities effectively banished HG from the curricula. When our movement enjoyed great popularity in Britain in the early years of the twentieth century, the House of Lords fought tooth and nail to defeat the geoist proposals known as the People's Budget, and soon afterwards the first real social welfare legislation was introduced as a palliative to quieten the geoist discontent. In other words, band aids were dispensed rather than root and branch reform which would get to the real source of poverty and injustice.

With 50 geoists clocked up, there's no shortage of other notable figures in history to continue this series – standing in line ready to take a bow are Leon Walras, Herbert Asquith, Mikhail Gorbachev, Ralph Nader, George Bernard Shaw, G.K. Chesterton, Chief Seattle, Confucius, Peter Stuyvesant and Jonathan Swift, just to name a few. If we had available the utterances of ancient historical figures, we would invariably be able to extend our list. For instance, the Old Testament has these verses which point to an understanding of how a rudimentary economic system should operate in primitive societies: "The profit of the earth is for all." (Eccles. 5:9), "The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." (Leviticus 25:23), and "The Earth hath He given to the children of men." (Psalm 115, 16)

Here's an admission I've never heard before – that there is another economic system which could be said to be superior to geoism. It was sung about in the sixties and seventies by Lennon, Dylan and their ilk as if it was a real possibility, if not an inevitability, for we thought we had seen through the materialism, greed and conflict that had bedeviled all of human history. The "system" was one of Love and Universal Brotherhood but it came a cropper basically because

humanity was not yet evolved enough to put it into practice (will it ever be?, you may well ask). Ideally, love would inspire us to share all we have without the need to have the state step in and impose a tax system.

This ideal of universal brotherhood was wildly naïve, premature, starry-eyed and based on a misreading of the ordinary existing motives of humanity.

Strange to say, I maintain that those wonderful ideals of Hippydom were ground down into dust by, to a large extent, the system of land monopoly capitalism in place that we well placed to entrap hearts and minds. But that is another story, dear reader, and too much of a digression from the lessons of history that our table of 50 geoists represents.

	Progress Issue	Name	Life Span	Nationality	Noted for....
1	Mar-April 02	Mark Twain	1835 – 1910	American	Author, social commentator
2	May-June 02	Leo Tolstoy	1828 – 1910	Russian	Novelist, philosopher, moralist
3	July-Aug 02	Thomas Carlyle	1795 – 1881	Scottish	Essayist, historian, social critic
4	Sep-Oct 02	John Stuart Mill	1806 – 1873	English	philosopher and social reformer
5	Nov-Dec 02	Ambrose Bierce	1842 – 1914	American	Writer, journalist
6	Jan-Feb 03	Clyde Cameron	1913 – 2008	Australian	Federal Minister under Whitlam
7	Mar-April 03	James Lalor	1807 – 1849	Irish	nationalist and agitator
8	May-June 03	Sun Yat Sen	1866 – 1925	Chinese	Father of the Chinese Revolution
9	July-Aug 03	Baruch Spinoza	1632 – 1677	Dutch	Philosopher, ethicist
10	Sep-Oct 03	Winston Churchill	1874 – 1965	English	Wartime leader
11	Nov-Dec 03	Walter Burley Griffin	1876 – 1937	American	Architect, designer of Canberra
12	Jan-Feb 04	Aldous Huxley	1894 – 1963	English	Novelist, futurist
13	March-April 04	A.B. "Banjo" Patterson	1864 – 1941	Australian	Poet, journalist
14	May-June 04	Albert Einstein	1879 – 1955	German-American	Physicist
15	July-Aug 04	Helen Keller	1880 – 1968	American	Deaf & blind activist
16	Sep-Oct 04	Thomas Paine	1737-1809	American	Political author & revolutionary
17	Nov-Dec 04	Edward McGlynn	1837 – 1900	Irish-American	liberal Catholic priest
18	Jan-Feb 05	David Lloyd George	1863 – 1945	Welsh	Wartime British PM
19	March-April 05	John Locke	1632 – 1704	English	Philosopher
20	May-June 05	Henry George	1839 – 1897	American	Economist
21	July-Aug 05	Richard Cobden	1804 – 1865	English	Politician, peace activist
22	Sep-Oct 05	Max Hirsch	1852-1909	German-Australian	Economist, traveller
23	Nov-Dec 05	William Penn	1644 – 1718	English-American	Governor, pacifist
24	Jan-Feb 06	Stamford Raffles	1781-1826	English	East Indies governor, humanitarian
25	Mar-Apr 06	Benjamin Franklin	1706 – 1790	American	Inventor, statesman, co-drafter of American constitution
26	May-Jun 06	Thomas More	1478 – 1535	English	Politician, courageous idealist
27	July – Aug 06	Gerard Winstanley	1609 – 1676	English	Christian communalist ("the Diggers"), writer, peacenik
28	Sep-Oct 06	Jean-Jacques Rousseau	1712 – 1778	French	Enlightenment philosopher
29	Nov-Dec 06	James Tobin	1918 – 2002	American	Nobel prize-winning economist, originator of Tobin Tax
30	Jan-Feb 07	William Ogilvie	1736 – 1819	Scottish	Economist, revolutionary
31	Mar-Apr 07	Clarence Darrow	1857 – 1938	American	Lawyer, social activist
32	May-Jun 07	Ron East	1899 – 1994	Australian	Government water engineer, environmentalist
33	July-Aug 07	Herbert Spencer	1820 – 1903	English	Political scientist, philosopher
34	Sep-Oct 07	Abraham Lincoln	1809 – 1865	American	US president, black emancipist
35	Nov-Dec 07	Arthur Henderson	1863-1935	Scottish	Leader of UK Labour Party, Nobel peace laureate
36	Jan-Feb 08	Voltaire	1694 – 1778	French	Libertarian, philosopher
37	Mar-Apr 08	George Orwell	1905-50	English	Author, political essayist
38	May-Jun 08	Thomas Jefferson	1743-1826	American	author of the US Declaration of Independence, third president of the US
39	July – Aug 08	Jack Craigie	1871-1966	Australian	Long-serving South Aust. MP
40	Sep-Oct 08	Adam Smith	1723 – 1790	Scottish	"The father of economics"
41	Nov-Dec 08	F. L. Wright	1867 – 1959	American	Architect
42	Jan-Feb 09	Ramsay MacDonald	1866-1937	Scottish	Twice British PM, pacifist
43	Mar-Apr 09	Harry Gunnison Brown	1880 – 1975	American	Maverick economics professor, author
44	May-Jun 09	Alfred Russel Wallace	1823 – 1913	Welsh	Co- discoverer of the theory of evolution, adventurer, environmentalist
45	July-Aug 09	William Vickery	1914-1996	Canadian	Nobel economics laureate
46	Sep-Oct 09	Bertrand Russell	1872 –1970	English	Philosopher, mathematician, political theorist, social reformist, pacifist
47	Nov-Dec 09	Gaetano Filangieri	1752 – 1788	Italian	Jurist, philosopher
48	Jan-Feb 10	Andrew Carnegie	1835 – 1919	Scottish-American	Second-richest man & greatest philanthropist in history
49	May-June 11	Philip Snowden	1864 - 1937	English	Twice Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer
50	July-Aug 11	H. G. Wells	1866-1946	English	Author, the father of science fiction