



Fundamentals

The United States of America is taking a path that is so egregiously wrong in so many ways that one is hard pressed to know where to start in crafting some sort of “response” — but respond we must. At the Henry George Institute, we seem to have the luxury of being “above the fray” in the sense that we’re trying to educate folks about the shape of a sane, prosperous and just society. Good grief: that ambition places us quite far from Day-to-Day Reality. There is a danger of learning to like it up here in theoretical la-la land, disdaining the multitudes who Just Don’t Get It. But, if we’re on the side of justice and truth, then something needs to be said.

“Patriotism,” it’s been said, “is the last refuge to which a scoundrel clings.” That’s one way of looking at it. A truer patriotism, though, calls upon a nation to live up to its ideals. There seems to be no area of national policy in which the United States is not running as fast as it can away from sanity, sustainability and justice. What is up, for example, with the Administration’s positively medieval reproductive-rights policy? And, of course, our Oilman-in-Chief subsidizes SUVs while summarily scrapping the Kyoto accords — no mystery in that. Nor, really, is there any surprise in the lawsuit protection given to pharmaceutical giants, buried in the Homeland Security legislation. Or the requirement for high schools to hand over every student’s address to military recruiters (or lose Federal funding), signed into law as part of the “No Child Left Behind Act”. Hundreds of “suspected terrorists” have been held for over a year with no hearings, no access to counsel and not even any stated charges. The “Patriot Acts” have pretty much repealed the Fourth Amendment. But it’s unseemly to quibble about such matters at a time like this — we’re at “war”. Osama’s still out there, and he’s just as pissed as ever.

I am no fan of Saddam, but come on, people. The Administration’s case for war was on the intellectual level of pro wrestling, and just as reality-based: Hussein, the leering villain about to be pile-driven by the star-spangled Good Guy. Are the Iraqi people suffering? Do we care? Saddam gassed his own people, we say! Well, yes, indeed he did: he gassed his own people with gas that we gave him, during the period when he was our ally, and after he gassed the agricultural Kurds in the North, we rewarded him with shipments of food to replace what the Kurds had been growing, but by all means, let’s bomb him now because he gassed his own people in 1981.

According to President Bush, Iraq’s oil belongs to the Iraqi people. What he probably meant by that was that the Iraqi people have *(continued on page 35)*

the inalienable right to hire Bechtel and Halliburton to restore their capacity to sell oil to Washington-approved buyers. The real common property, in Bush's view, are the archaeological treasures of the Iraq Museum, which were immediately distributed to whoever wanted to come and take them. Now that's the free market at work!

Many people have argued that this war wasn't really about oil. But people who say things like that have never played *Risk*, the popular board game of geopolitical strategy. Every game flirts with Armageddon; world domination is the goal; playing it affords one a Kissengeresque sense of utter amoral power. The Iraq thing, at any rate, isn't about the oil that Iraq will be pumping next year, but about US hegemony over world energy resources. Iraq is a postcolonial state, like so many others, that has no organic history as a nation. The boundaries of Iraq were drawn around disparate groups with distinct cultures, languages and traditional allegiances. Iraq existed as a nation because it occupied an important square in the Western chess game.

Therefore, when it came time to remove Saddam, the US found (what a surprise!) that there existed no "Iraqi people" sufficiently unified to remove him. He had to be replaced by an occupying army from the United States, that the world would see as imperialist! They would see it as imperialist because of the paramount strategic importance of the oil fields, and the United States cannot deny that!

Georgist education offers a real alternative to the dismal fatalism that pretends to be economic and political analysis today. That's why we seem so obscure and so "ivory tower". What we're saying seems outlandish because it seeks to define basic principles and reason out their logical implications. In a world of disinformation, an endeavor of this sort seems positively kooky. These days people are just not trained to look for the reasons for things.

Julian Gross issues a call, in this issue, for Georgists to get out there on the barricades and join those who deplore modern-day imperialism and "globalization". He's right — and yet in our efforts to Mix It Up, we must do more than simply to join the chorus of voices screaming "NO!" For it is only by means of a searching consideration of the concepts of land rent, and the moral basis of ownership, that any sense can be made of the global political situation — or any hope found in it.

When the marchers for peace and the anti-globalizers stop for a moment to wonder how to actually get from here to where they want to be, our job is to know *exactly what to tell them*. We've got to be a worm, a determined little agent of deconstruction, seeking out what's rotten in every side's rhetoric and feeding on it, to gain strength. **GJ**