

breaking ground

Axe the land tax say Aussies

The land tax 'outrage' in Australia continues. New South Wales campaigners are pooling their indignation. MP Shelley Hancock put forward a compelling argument: "This is a stupid tax," Mrs Hancock said. "The land tax needs to be axed and Bob Carr cannot ignore the damage it is doing,



not only on the South Coast but across the State." She also claimed the land tax "was ripping the heart out of local communities."

Prior to an anti-land tax rally, estate agent Phillip Muller spoke out against the tax: "Ours is just one business that relies on the South Coast being seen as a place to invest in property, but the State Government's land tax simply means investors are looking to greener interstate pastures."

But progressive reformers in Australia continue to advocate increasing land taxes which have long been a feature of their fiscal systems

Scots council tax review delays

The Scottish Executive-sponsored review of local government funding is facing delays. The review is set to weigh the pros and cons of a range of local taxes - including land value tax - judging them on a range of criteria.

Jack McConnell, the Scottish first minister, said that while he hoped to see the results of Sir Peter Burt's review on local government funding before the ending of the current parliament, he was unsure if it would be completed by the next Holyrood elections in 2007.

Burt's review, which was announced last June amid growing anger over council tax rises, is supposed to report by mid-2006. But its four member committee has been given a broad and complex remit.

An Executive spokesperson reported the review was making good progress towards its deadline. She said there was no reason "at present" to suggest it would overrun, but that the review, if necessary, might seek permission to extend its work.

BBC: average London house price £300k

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Average house prices in London are now standing at £302,000, says BBC News. This means prospective buyers must earn an average £75,500 a year in order to become a mortgaged homeowner.

But the average salary of a London key worker is only just over £20,000. This makes the average London house almost 15 times dearer than what the people who need to live in them earn - far beyond the 3.5 times their salary formula which most mortgage lenders are willing to lend house buyers.

Meanwhile, an ordinary-looking end-of-terrace council house has gone on the market for a massive £895,000. When first bought from the council in 1972, the house cost only £15,300. But the property's attractive Chelsea location, just a stone's throw from Fulham Road, has pushed the price up. The new owner can hobnob with celebrity neighbours like Robbie Williams, Liz Hurley, Leslie Ash and Anthea Turner.

According to mortgage lender Proviser, an average terraced house in Kensington and Chelsea was costing over £1.4m by the end of last year.

Highland wind farm pays back to community

A planning application has been submitted for a 133-turbine wind farm on the Eishken Estate in the Scottish Highlands. It is proposed that 33 of the turbines will be entirely community-owned.

Based on the project operating at a conservative efficiency rate of 35% and modest electricity prices, it has been estimated that the community trust would receive an annual sum of around £12.5m.

Much of this income will be profit from a commercial enterprise. However, opportunities are arising both in the Highlands and offshore, for communities to reclaim substantial amounts in location rents from renewables developments.



letter from the editor

It is an acute irony that at this very juncture in the history of the British Isles, when many of our communities seem almost ready to tip head-long into a period of social and political reform enlightened by the Georgist paradigm, the venerable institution that has been the backbone to the advance - the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain - now finds itself having to restructure all its activities to within an inch of zero. Our diminishing resources are insufficient for our present extensive program of work.

There is of course a paradox here: if people are so near to sharing our way of thinking and adopting our proposals, why do they not support our work with money?

The answer undoubtedly lies in our own message and the language we have been using to express it. In spite of an ongoing attempt to draw out from the historical legacy of georgism a new story, engagingly told - giving inspiration which leads others to act - we have so far failed to find a coherent new 21st century discourse which *speaks to people*.

Those outside the movement who should have been running to the assistance of the Foundation over the last few months have failed to answer the call. It is not that they have not heard the call - surely our recent fundraising efforts must have ensured that. It is, rather, that on hearing it, they have not understood its meaning or its importance for their own concerns.

This is a sorry failure.

So what do we do now? The Foundation has traditionally relied on the stalwart voluntary input of its members and supporters. Our activity in the immediate future will rely on the efforts of volunteers.

But, well, well above any need to maintain some level of activity in the world, it is clear that the Foundation has one most important task in front of it - if not indeed a duty: *it must help bring into being a new public dialogue on the relationship between private life and the public sector*.

We must speak of the provision of quality public services and infrastructure when economically warranted or socially necessary; security for those who are beyond working, through fair pensions and citizen's dividends; transparency, accountability and efficiency in public finances, past the current political rhetoric; the ending of something-for-nothing thinking, whether in benefits culture (small beer) or in rising house prices (big beer); the promotion of trade justice by freedom and by fairness; the protection of private life from intrusion and the liberating of the individual to act as an enlightened self-interested agent; the securing of the rights of the community to protect both itself and its environment; and the constitutional protection of both individual and community from the abuse of power of the other, exercised especially in the guise of undemocratic corporate interests whether public or private.

If Henry George were alive today, these are the kind of things he would be speaking about to communicate his insights of profound social justice.

If the Henry George Foundation is to rise again and take its proper place in the world, these are the things our potential supporters - intellectual and financial - will want to speak and hear about.

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