

Letter from the editor

Land&Liberty

No 1221 Vol 115 Spring 2008

212 Piccadilly, London, W1J 9HG
ph +44 (0) 20 7917 1899
e office@LandandLiberty.net

Editor Peter Gibb

Executive Editor Lars Rindsig

Publisher Henry George Foundation

Contributors LL Blake, Edward J Dodson, Fred Harrison, Alanna Hartzok, Brian Hodgkinson, Geoffrey Lee, Ole Lefmann, Prof. Iain McLean, James Robertson, Jo Stocks, Prof. Nic Tideman and David Triggs.

To receive **Land&Liberty** and to support the work of the Henry George Foundation contact us at the address above.

Land&Liberty has chronicled world events for over 100 years. It has offered a unique perspective with its reports, analysis and comment on the core issues of political economy. And that uniqueness remains.

Land&Liberty aims to explore how our common wealth should be used – and to demonstrate that this is the key to building the bridge of sustainability between private life, the public sector and our resources – between the individual, the community and the environment.

Land&Liberty – putting people at the heart of economics.

Copyright in this and other **Land&Liberty** publications belongs to the Henry George Foundation which welcomes approaches for the reproduction of articles. However reproduction is prohibited without prior written permission of the copyright holders. No responsibility will be accepted for any errors or omissions or comments made by contributors or interviewees. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publishers. Goods and services advertised are not necessarily endorsed by the publishers.

Land&Liberty is produced on a *pro bono* basis by the Henry George Foundation and printed by A Local Printer Ltd on Reville 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

ISSN 0023-7574



The Henry George Foundation is an independent economic and social justice think tank and public education group with offices in London and members throughout the UK. The Foundation deals in cutting-edge ideas, exploring and promoting principles for a just and prosperous society and a healthy environment.

The Henry George Foundation of Great Britain Limited is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England, no. 00956714, and a charity registered in England under the Charities Act 1960, no. 259194.

www.HenryGeorgeFoundation.org

www.LandandLiberty.net

POLITICS is sometimes characterised as ‘the art of the possible’ – a remark of Bismarck’s. But government’s reaching out for what is ‘possible’ must be enlightened by a deep sense of what is ‘right’.

Yet it seems that in our present age it is expediency and not morality which guides the hand of government. And we see that hand increasingly having a mind of its own.

Nic Tideman shows us how modern government’s taxation has so easily avoided being what is *right*, and become simply a “convenient exaction, undertaken by those in power to serve their own purposes and lacking a suitable ethical rationale.”

Government of course must fight its corner, and spin the principal thread of public discourse. And political language is designed to persuade. But the citizen must confront government dissemblance.

‘Presumed consent’ is Orwellian Newspeak for *without* consent. A system of opt-out coercive organ removal is of course ‘possible’ – and might well be expedient – but it is one more immoral government *take* in the long tradition which includes conventional taxation.

Our ‘donation’ cover story is an instance of government that has gone wrong; although, in this instance, more likely through stupidity than wickedness; government’s proclivity for unethical taxation, on the other hand, at root more an instance of the latter.

We must guard against such inclinations in government. Leslie Blake reminds us of Plato’s dialogue in the Republic: “Say then, my friend, in what manner does tyranny arise? — that it has a democratic origin is evident”. Tyranny, observes Plato, “great and famous...the fourth and worst disorder of a State...by fraud and force takes away the property of others, not little by little but wholesale; comprehending in one, things sacred as well as profane, private and public”. ‘Presumed consent’ is the wholesale forced taking of our sacred private earthly remains: a thing which only can be *given* – by consent explicit – and not taken.

In the end the ‘presumed consent’ argument will be lost. But it may be that, before any ethical argument wins the day, the property rights question which inheres in the proposal will bring the defeat.

The organs needed for any transplant programme could be delivered by a properly funded ongoing campaign of public education and persuasion; indeed so they should be. But governments don’t want to spend that money, and are taking the easy course.

Yet the unseen but logical corollary of a dead person’s body being deemed a ‘societal resource’ – a public asset – is that, to the degree that the body is of no public use, either in its parts or in whole, it must properly be a *public* liability: so that fact too must be provided for within any reform. Government has not yet thought of it, and the medical professionals advocating ‘presumed consent’ have a too-tightly focused perspective to have considered it, but the policy companion of coercive organ removal is the universal state provision of funerals. Once government realises that point, and does its sums, the economic imperative for this iniquitous reform will evaporate, and with it any political calls for ‘presumed consent’ – which will free people, once again, to ‘give the gift of life’.

Peter Gibb
editor@LandandLiberty.net

