

# LAND and LIBERTY

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COVER PHOTO: The Bishop of Shrewsbury who wants to be a "stirrer upper" on the vexed issue of local government finance in Britain. Story: Back Page.

## Torch of freedom

AFTER the euphoria, the phobia. The destruction of Marxism by the weight of economic reality has unleashed the prejudices that have lain dormant for decades in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

A philosophical vacuum now hangs over a large part of the European continent, waiting to be filled. People (as well as nature) abhor vacuums.

First there was socialism, which came to the fore in 1917 to guide the exploited masses when the corrupt Tsarist system collapsed in the East. Millions of peasants died in Stalin's gulags.

Then fascism filled the void left by the jubilant allies, who could think of nothing but exacting tribute from the Germans after the First World War. That gave Hitler's intellectual perversions a clear run. Millions died in the gas chambers.

What now?

The former socialist countries are attracted by the materialism of the West but their leaders are not imbued with a new philosophy to guide their actions. So the masses chant "market economy," but little else.

Not surprisingly, the worst excesses of nationalism are re-emerging in the East. Even in the West, a new wave of anti-semitism is signalling disaffection with social conditions in capitalist societies.

The world hungers for a new vision.

It needs to be one that will guide everyone to a better quality of life.

Which can help them to accommodate their neighbours, during times of political stress.

That will enhance respect for the living environment, just as higher expectations are raising the demands on the resources of nature.

In other words, the search is on for a school of thought that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable us to evolve a new social system out of the ashes of the old.

Ashes?

We stress: evolution - not revolu-

tion. Marx tried to rupture the present from the past, and in doing so tore people away from the cultural continuities that are the crucial reference points which pin people to sane behaviour.

The new philosophy, if it is allowed to emerge, will draw its strengths from the best elements of capitalism and socialism.

The strength of capitalism is its acceptance of the liberty of the individual. Ultimately, the market economy cannot function without the freedom of each person to act according to what he perceives to be in his best interests.

The strength of socialism is its recognition that there is a legitimate social dimension to everyone's life: that men and women are not isolated individuals, that happiness and progress is contingent on cooperation.

What eluded both these systems was a mechanism for linking the individual and social dimensions into a working system that honoured the laws of morality.

Elements of the solution are to be found scattered in the literature, both ancient and modern, but they found their fullest expression in the works of one man: Henry George, a 19th century American social reformer whose seminal *Progress And Poverty* is at once both a work of art, a treatise on morality and a manifesto for political and economic action.

That is why we choose to commend the works of that man. His vision of the good life was evidently not synchronised with the times in which he lived, but it lived on.

We sincerely believe that the time has come to turn his vision into practical politics. That places an onerous burden on those who claim to advocate the humane principles and shrewd fiscal policies that are embedded in *Progress And Poverty*.

For if we miss this opportunity, many people will probably die; and the chance to hand the torch of freedom to everyone in the world will not return again in our lifetimes.