

LAND and LIBERTY

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COVER PHOTO: Sara Parkin, one of the British Green Party's leaders, who says that land value taxation is now a "positively mainstream" policy. Report: page 88.

SIMPLY DOES IT

SIMPLE solutions to global problems ought to be viewed with scepticism. Especially when they claim to deal with seemingly intractable crises in politics, economics and ecology. All in one big Smash Hit.

Starting on page 83 we outline the framework for a policy that claims to do just that. The strategy is underpinned by a simple fiscal policy that seeks to harmonise disparate interests. Not by coercion, but by consent. Not by standardisation, but by encouraging cultural diversity. By the devolution, not the centralisation, of power.

It would work by synthesising the interests of individuals and of nations. By removing poverty in the process of giving concrete expression to the rights of the individual based on sharing nature's bountiful resources (nature never was niggardly: that always was an ethnocentric libel).

The supra-national institutions that are proposed would realign international relations on the basis of duties stemming from the control over territory.

And looking to the future, an ethical basis for space-age collaboration is created - literally: the recognition of the interdependence of nations, married to the acceptance of mutual rights over natural resources, lays the foundations for international cooperation in the colonisation of the planets and the use of intergalactic resources.

THIS futuristic philosophy is not addressed to problems very far away. In the next 50 years population will multiply by another three billion people. Over 90% of this increase will be in developing countries, "many of which seem to be approaching the limits of their land's productive capacity at current input levels," according to the World Resources Institute.

This ominous threshold threatens the world order and the future of Mankind. It means that,

by the year 2,025, the world could be confronted by crises induced by either (or probably both) of the following causes of conflict.

• Cross-border incursions in the search for "new" land. Since there would be no "new" land left, this demographic pressure in favour of territorial expansion would encourage military conflict.

The wars would start as localised disputes, but we can expect many of them; and hip-pocket sized nuclear weapons will not mean that the rest of us can grandstand the madness now being enacted in Lebanon.

• Over-exploitation of land, leading to irreversible damage to the eco-system. Already, about 6-7m hectares are rendered unproductive per annum because of erosion. Additionally, the productivity of up to 1,5m hectares of cropland is reduced each year because of water-logging, salinization and alkalization.

We now know that the major cause of this despoliation of nature is government-sanctioned laws, which distort the market economy. For example, subsidies induce farmers to employ ecologically-harmful methods of cultivation. The biggest single error, however, is the failure to tax the rental value of land: this is now proven to be the major cause of wanton destruction of our habitat.

ACTION has to be orchestrated on a global scale, but it can only be implemented locally. This means that, while the framework has to be all-embracing, the dynamics for action have to be conceptualised at the level of the individual.

That means family-sized farms. Fair returns for labour and the investment of capital. Equity in the share-out of the value of the resources of nature. Bold action by statesmen in the direction of liberty, not bureaucracy.

We believe that these goals cannot be accomplished by any solution other than the one articulated in this issue.