

Origins and solutions

Geoffrey Lee examines the Enclosures and the relevance of the Georgist doctrines promoted in Europe 100 years ago

AS WELL AS reshaping the physical appearance of England the enclosures made fundamental changes to the economic life of the country. Enclosure began in the 15th century and continued for over 500 years. Indeed, its origins may go back to the Black Death in 1348-49 when depopulation made conversion of arable land into sheep pasture a necessity since there was neither the labour to work the fields (often a community would have lost half of its farm workers) nor the people to consume their produce.

Enclosure was a legal process and it took many different forms. These developed over the centuries in ways that make it difficult to get a clear picture of what actually happened. Steven Hollowell has produced a masterly study of the enclosures and unravelled an extraordinarily complex story. He has also produced a blueprint for other researchers on how to tackle record offices and archive repositories to extract the necessary nuggets that will give a true idea of what many believe to be one of the greatest episodes of social injustice in our history.

There were, the author says, ultimately three methods of enclosing land for agricultural use: informal enclosure; enclosure by formal agreement (but often confirmed by a legal court of law); and enclosure by Private or General Act of Parliament. Interestingly, he points out, there are at least fourteen Public Enclosure Acts still on the statute books today.

The time scale makes it difficult to give a coherent picture of the reasons and modes of enclosure. For example, J.R. Wordie analysed the enclosure of Leicestershire as follows:

era	% of the county enclosed
pre1500	9.06
1500-1599	8.41
1600-1699	33.66
1700-1759	6.69
1760-1799	35.47
1800-1844	6.71
	100.00

Predominantly, agricultural efficiency was the original reason for enclosure. There could be as many as 70 plots belonging to one farmer scattered over the open fields. The moving of equipment from one small plot to another, particularly when new, heavier, implements were introduced, made farming laborious and unnecessarily time consuming.

Another factor was the Dissolution of the Monasteries with the Church relinquishing its land to secular landlords. The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 reflected the spiritual element of this great upheaval.

The Church continued to hold land –

indeed the parish incumbent relied on the income from his glebe farm and the tithes paid by the villagers. Quite often when the parish was enclosed by Act of Parliament the latter was replaced by a one-off grant of land. There was also a *Land Tax* which was introduced towards the end of the 17th century and eventually abolished in 1963. Again the enclosures altered the way that this was collected.

A great many enclosures were accomplished by agreement and without protest, but often there were bitter disputes. In 1607 an uprising broke out in Warwickshire and spread to Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. A mob of some 3,000 tore up the new enclosure hedges and fences and filled in the new ditches. The protesters called themselves Levellers or Diggers. At Newton 1,000 rioters were confronted by a mounted body of the local gentry and their servants and were routed. Between forty and fifty were killed and many more were arrested, hanged and quartered, their quarters being put on display in the local towns. Subsequently, Steven Hollowell tells us, a pardon was issued.

There were other rebellions but inevitably they were crushed and their leaders executed and the enclosures went on. Landlords would evict cottagers from their homes and holdings after the harvest was in and then let them perish during the long winter months with nowhere to live. Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* claims:

About 1750, the yeomanry had disappeared, and so had, in the last decade of the 18th century, the last trace of the common land of the agricultural labourer.

Steven Hollowell thinks the Marxist view of enclosure far too simplistic. A great number of enclosures were debated and argued over quite peaceably and often at length. Some enclosure acts took twenty to thirty years to complete. But the truth is that, even allowing for disturbances such as the Swing Riots of the 1830s being mainly caused by the agricultural depression, the country was totally, and often violently, changed by the enclosures. The ordinary man lost his independence and ability to sustain himself and family. As John Clare puts it:

Inclosure came and trampled on the grave
Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave ...

This book gives an important insight into this complicated and often apparently contradictory process. But as the author says: "There is still much more to be uncovered before we know the complete story".

Enclosure Records For Historians by Steven Hollowell, Chichester: Phillimore, £15.99

THE TRANSLATION of Michael Silagi's book by Susan N. Faulkner covers some of the successes and failures of Henry George's ideas in Europe. His efforts in Britain are well known with the People's Budget in every history book. His ideas influenced the founders of the Fabian Society, with Sidney Webb saying that *Progress and Poverty* "sounded the dominant note of the English Socialist party of to-day".

What is less well known is his impact on Germany, Denmark, Hungary and Austria, and outside Europe in Japan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Russia.

In his homeland, the United States, his social philosophy was all but forgotten after the first World War. Outside the USA there were stalwart supporters with considerable influence. Tolstoy promoted George's ideas in Russia and they were taken up by Kerensky, whose administration introduced land and tax reform with peasants forming their own cooperatives. However, Trotsky staged the Bolshevik coup that brought Lenin to power. He abolished the Duma and the Kerensky administration. Lenin's successor, Stalin, suppressed the peasants' cooperatives, murdered their political leaders and herded farmers into state-controlled collectives killing six million peasants in the process.

Ireland, with its less violent but nevertheless turbulent history, should have been a fertile ground for George's ideas but he was disappointed by what happened there. According to Silagi, with 600,000 tenant farmers and 20,000 landlords George thought Ireland a fruitful country to consider the land question but, because the British Parliament persuaded the landlords to ameliorate the lot of their tenants, it never became a major issue. Instead republicanism replaced land reform.

Progress and Poverty was translated into German in 1881 where land reformers existed in small societies. But by and large the country was uninterested in the land question. August Stamm, a forerunner of George, had called for the nationalization of land and accused George of plagiarism. Henry George responded in an open letter to the German land reformers:

At the time when I wrote *Progress and Poverty* (and in fact until quite recently), I had never heard of Dr Stamm; but I am ready to grant Dr Stamm the

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to 'the land problem'

honor of having gone into battle before me. When I spoke in Oxford, England, Mr Marshall, the Professor of Economics, declared that there was nothing in *Progress and Poverty* that was both new and true. I replied that I was quite willing to accept this characterization of my book, since what is true cannot be new. And that which gives me the certainty that the conclusions I have reached are essentially true is the fact that so many persons have independently reached the same ones.

In 1898, Adolf Damaschke, a keen follower of George, founded the Union of German Land Reformers. In the same year Wilhelm Schrameier, another Georgist, and Governor of Kiaochow, a large German colony in China, introduced Land Value Taxation. This continued until 1914 when the first World War put an end to German rule in China.

Perhaps the most remarkable story in this book concerns Hungary, where *Progress and Poverty* had not appeared in translation until 1914. There it was read by Julius J. Pikler, who had been a panel doctor but later moved into the Statistics Office in Budapest becoming Deputy Director in 1906. Single-handed, without the help of any movement, organisation or political group, he persuaded the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and head of the centre party to look at the merits of LVT. His senior position in the government and his being a Freemason no doubt helped. In November 1917 the Budapest City Council adopted an "ordinance for the city land value tax in Budapest".

Pikler then toured the country and within a year had encouraged seven other cities to adopt LVT. He went on to other countries, including Austria, spreading the Georgist word. In 1923 he spoke at the International Georgist Congress in Oxford and reported his activities in an article in *Land & Liberty*.

The Hungarian experiment with LVT was ended, as so often has been the case, by war and revolution. The LVT regulations were never rescinded but in 1921 the authorities suspended the collection of the tax for the time being. That, according to Michael Silagi, is the state of affairs today, the city agencies not having returned to the matter since.

This is an important book for anyone who wants to know how LVT was implemented in Europe and why, in so many cases, it failed. Often, apart from war, the reason was simply voter apathy. A warning that all Georgists should heed.

Henry George and Europe, Michael Silagi, New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation \$12

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

More Taxation, Please

KENNETH JUPP



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS and the left socialist wing of the Labour Party would both like to see taxes raised. They want to spend more on social services including health. Their object may be laudable, but the method they suggest for getting the necessary money is deplorable. LVT campaigners suggest a better way – the Single tax. To the man in the street, this is just as deplorable. "What, a tax on land? Although it might be a good idea to make those landowners in Scotland pay for their thousands of acres, you would hardly collect enough that way to pay the salaries of the MPs and the government ministers. And anyway, why tax the country people? It's the people who get their money in the City, and keep their Mercs and BMWs in their suburban homes, who are the rich ones."

The man in the street is right. "Land" to him means rural acres. Tell him that city land can be worth millions per acre, and he will reply: "Of course it can. Those huge sky scrapers must cost millions to build". Mention *urban land* and he will take it to mean playing fields, gardens, and village greens. If people are to understand the Georgist message, it must be conveyed in terms that can be understood.

A person will never understand that land "includes the whole external world accessible to man, with all its powers, qualities and products..." He will find it easier to stomach the idea that land "comprises all having material form that man has received or can receive from God". The metaphysical viewpoint is so often the simplest to explain. The individual is surrounded with the rest of creation, human and non-human. The ease with which he can reach what he wants to help him with his work, determines how much he can produce for a given effort. Placed among a throng of potential customers his shop is bound to prosper. So a High Street location is ideal, and will of course be costly. On a Welsh hillside keeping a shop will be impossible. Scratching a living from sheep will usually be the best. But the land will cost him very little. This is as it should be. But the question is – to whom should that cost be paid?

No wonder that tax is a dirty word. The

burden of tax placed on employers in every kind of business today is astonishing. The employer pays direct to the revenue a tax assessed on the employee's status in the complicated income tax rules. The amount depends on whether he or she is married, has children, receives other income and so on.

The employee only receives the net amount after tax, and is concerned only with what it will buy. And nothing he buys is free of indirect taxes. Most things are subject to VAT, and that is added automatically to the price. Even without VAT, there is the PAYE of all who worked to make the article. For example, the price of a loaf has to cover the PAYE of the farm workers who produce the corn, the millers who turn it into flour, the bakers who make it into bread, and those who serve the loaf at the shop where the wage earner finally buys it. No government statistician has ever been asked to calculate the tax element contained in the price of bread. And, of course, the huge excise duty on motor fuel in carrying the corn to mill, the flour to bakery, and the bread to the shop has to be covered by the price paid by the consumer. What is true of bread is true of everything we buy.

This may be known to quite a few sensible people, even though politicians are blind to it. What is known to very few is that the wage paid by an employer has to cover these hidden, indirect taxes. So the employer pays in respect to each employee: PAYE to the exchequer; and to the employee a wage sufficient to support the standard of living he expects, and that includes a considerable element of taxation which the employee will pay the exchequer through the various purchases he makes. If he drinks, smokes, or runs a car, which is by no means abnormal today, he will pay huge excise duty on all these things.

A recent report from the Research group of the School of Economic Science shows that for the lowest paid workers, the tax burden on employers amounts to 40% of the workers' gross pay. This rises to 90% when gross pay reaches a mere £12,000. Put another way, 90% of the nation's revenue is collected from businesses by the simple expedient of doubling the cost of employment.