

# letter from the editor

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In this issue we have an emphasis on the environment. This brings out a dimension of the land question which is easily overlooked when economics is confined to human exchange. All too often the 'earth' is taken as mere 'resources' from which to extract whatever is commercially desirable. Part of the reason the land is no longer considered a factor of production is that it has been abstracted into anonymous resources. Yet the land is our habitat. It is where we live, our home – our *only* home.

So how has it got reduced to a mere commercial resource? Clearly the notion that it can be privately owned and disposed of according to the whim of the owner has profoundly distorted our natural relationship with the land, turning our habitat into a commodity. This wrong relationship with the land is the mother of all economic ills, from poverty, inequality, exploitation and destruction of the environment.

While the law of rent illustrates how the community creates a value beyond that of the effort of labour, and that this value should not be appropriated by any private individual, so likewise the land itself gives freely our natural habitat and the abundance of nature. This gift precedes the law of rent and grounds it. Our economic relation with the land extends beyond the natural arising of revenue for the government of the community and nation.

Just as there is the law of rent, so likewise there is a law of return, where whatever is taken from the land is replenished by nature. This is obvious in farming, especially organic farming where the natural fertility of the land replenishes itself. Where this natural cycle is ignored, the land becomes infertile and may turn to barren desert.

The cycles of nature are as much a part of the economy as the cycles of returns on labour or capital investment. Caring for the earth and caring for the community are two sides of one natural responsibility.

Environmentalists, in their appropriate concern for the earth and living creatures, all too often fail to grasp the economic side of the environmental question. Instead of seeking to understand the laws of economics, they seek to impose restraints upon production and consumption. It is similar to the mistake made by those who seek to remove poverty through redistribution of wealth. An unjust economic arrangement can only be fully remedied by a just economic arrangement. So likewise with the environment. And if the cause of poverty and the destruction of the environment are the same cause, then the just remedy belongs to both at the same time. The questions of poverty and of the environment should not be separated.

If the application of George's proposals for the collection of the land tax would remove economic injustice, then it is worth considering its further implications in our relationship with the earth and the whole of the natural world. The human community is as much a part of nature as that of any other species, and the question of justice extends beyond the community to the whole of nature. At this time, when we see ever-increasing inequality as well as the growing threat of climate change through abuse of the earth, we are surely called to see that the two issues have a common cause and a common remedy.

For this issue of Land&Liberty we have especially commissioned the article Henry George, Economic Justice and the Environment by David Cadman and Scherto Gill who work extensively for social, economic and environmental reform. With the latest report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published October 8 the need to connect care for the earth with economic justice could not be clearer.



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