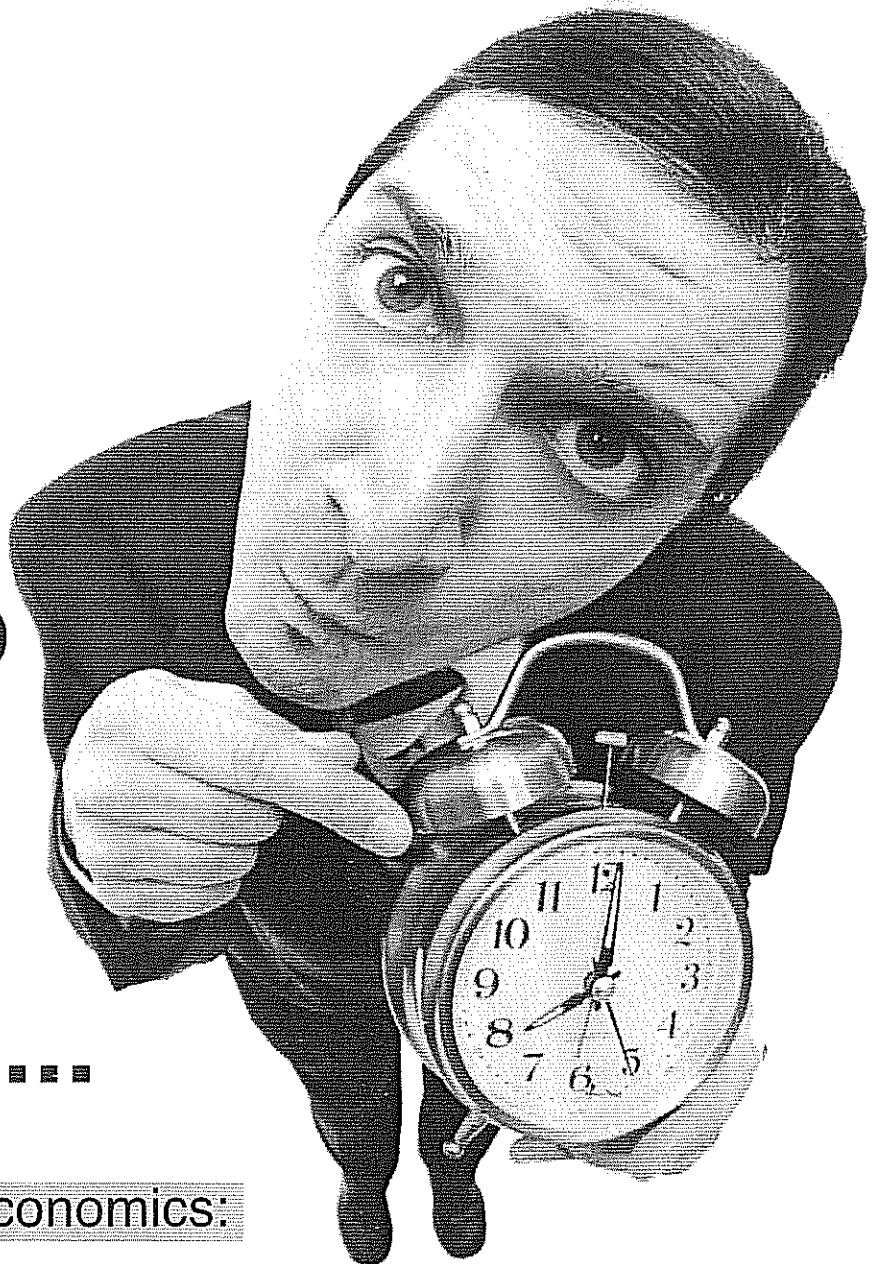


Wake up you've been screwed...



Lessons in Land economics:

This rock lyric 'Clover' by Scottish songwriter A.A. Reid sums up the puzzle Britain's young people are wrestling with. How is it bankers are getting back their bonuses, while town halls slash public services and student tuition fees promise a £50K bill to the privileged? Why is there in the national zeitgeist, a widespread suspicion that someone somewhere is, to quote Ricky Gervais, having a laff?

To understand the answer, some might say you have to dislodge the spectacles you have been wearing since birth and have a fresh look at the country you're in.

We are taught to look at land, land ownership and property in a certain way. It's not our fault, these spectacles were put in place 1000 years ago, when the French Vikings arrived in 1066 and started carving up the place. Fast forward to the 21stC, and here we are getting more steamed up about who wins the X Factor, than asking just why it is we spend our lives servicing ever bigger mortgages on ever tinier homes - if that is - we are lucky to be on the property ladder at all. And why it is that 99.9% of us live on less than 7.5% of the UK land mass while

two thirds of this land is owned by just 189,000 families - often registered in secretive offshore companies and bolstered by tax subsidies not in the public domain. Why do we not go mad questioning these realities which shape our lives to such evil effect? The answer is quite simply, it is not our place to ask. We may have the vote, a car and broadband but we remain firmly in the grip of a feudal system. And so, these spectacles weigh heavy on us and we binge eat and binge drink and feel screwed.

Now look carefully without those spectacles. What do you call a system when you need a constant stream of first time buyers and tax payers paying subsidies to keep those few at the top of the pile rich and getting richer? In other circumstances you'd call it a Ponzi Scheme. So let's call it the Plantagenet Ponzi Scheme after those conquering Normans who brought with them a nice tight legal system of title deeds and primogeniture. Of course Ponzi Schemes, like New Yorker Bernie Madoff's, are usually illegal, and always fail when there are not enough newcomers coming in at the bottom to enrich the old hands further up the pyramid. But don't worry, this is never going

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***Grey old people eat you up for breakfast,
Fit them up then ship them out to Texas
Heh those boomers ain't no more life's nexus,
Crash and burn a legacy so feckless.
I believe that come the revolution,
There must be some answers, some solution
All that feudal crap is just pollution,
All those Princelings just a drag a nuisance***

'Clover'- A.A Reid

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to happen with our Plantagenet Ponzi Scheme because the whole country is in on it. The price can be terrible for the young and the poor, at the bottom of the pack of cards, but tough. Various levers are employed to prop up the Scheme when times are tough to wait for the fresh blood to arrive: today it's quantitative easing and public spending cuts. Young people are told to get over themselves for complaining about £9K tuition fees. Luckily for those at the top of the Scheme, the medicine is working: the FT on November 20th reports 'property moguls' fortunes rise again.' Happy days.

Now the key to understanding the present situation is to grasp just once basic fact: that most of the time, the Plantagenet Ponzi Scheme mosies along quite happily, borne up by the taxed and toiling masses. However periodically there are opportunities or threats which make the Scheme swing into action. Back in the 15th and 16th centuries, the dissolution of the monasteries and the Reformation saw the landowners, from the Crown down, get their hands on Catholic church lands. In the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the Enclosures and Clearances shoved the revolting peasants off the land, most conveniently into the factories which were enriching landowners as shareholders. (Usefully mitigated the loss of income when slavery was abolished) And then in the 20th Century, wars, though Depression, inheritance tax and universal suffrage were irritations, in the 1980s along came Council house sales which at a stroke brought plenty of fresh blood in at the bottom. If you are in the Ponzi Scheme, you won't risk questions just what is going on further up the chain. Know your place and keep up with the Jones, and don't worry if the real game is being played out at your expense elsewhere.

Now no one would want to design a sad little island society like this where fear, forelock tugging and social injustice are built into the brickwork, but we are where we are, and after 1000 years of conditioning, wheat do we do now? For with the Linked in mouthy, large indebted middle class, the Ponzi Scheme is going to have to do better than pushing poor policemen into battle and goading bright young people into breaking the law. Let's start by asking our braver politicians to take off the old spectacles and see just how badly the Plantagenet Ponzi Scheme needs reform, if we are to avoid social unrest and dislocation.

Let's abolish the law of primogeniture, the right to lodge the land title deeds in offshore companies and abolish Crown rights over Crown lands using the revenues to create a land fund for greater community land ownership - from which income could fund public services. And let's follow Australia, Canada and the U.S. and introduce a land tax which will allow all of us to benefit from the value of the land our economic activity creates so young people have an education. This country must add up - for everyone. No pious hope, but a cry for action before it is too late.

Further reading available on Amazon

'The Poor Had No Lawyers' Andy Wightman Birlinn Books

'Who Owns Britain' Kevin Cahill Canongate

'Life Before The Pen' A.A. Reid Lime Tea Books