

# LAND&LIBERTY

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## message from the honorary president

Following the UK's referendum decision and after more than three and a half years of futile argument, two general elections and three prime ministers, we have now left the European Union. The government needs to adopt a new set of trade policies so a reminder of what Henry George had to say about trade is timely.

George emphasised that genuine free trade is a win/win voluntary activity. People only choose to exchange things if they value what they receive more highly than what they part with. He also points out that neither trade nor exchange makes anything good that is not naturally good, or make property of things that by their nature, or by man-made laws, are not legitimate property. So, the purchase of a person or land originally acquired by capture or conquest does not legitimise slavery or the duty free holding of land. Nor does trade in stolen goods or banned substances or products such as narcotics or weapons (or chlorinated chickens if UK law banned them) legitimise their possession.

George identifies trade or exchange as a critical 'mode of production' alongside the modes of 'growing' (agricultural industries) and 'modifying' (extractive and manufacturing industries). He also credits trade as lying at the root of civilisations since it arises from the interdependent, social and cooperative aspects of human nature. Today almost all the goods and services every person, household and business wants and needs are produced and provided by others. In the process people, individually, locally, and nationally are able to specialise, better realise their potential, and maximise their social contribution. Natural or artificial forces that reduce people's ability to trade reduce these benefits. Historically states resorted to a siege or blockade in order to prevent their enemies from obtaining by trade the things they needed, while today they employ 'sanctions' first! The paradox is that by imposing taxes, tariffs and duties on trade in times of peace states have consistently *damaged themselves* in the same way that their enemies would seek to damage them in times of war.

However, governments throughout the world continue to damage their own interests and those of other countries by taxing trade in consumer and capital goods. Prompted by the lobbying of a few powerful interest groups, suffering under confusions associated with the issue, use and abuse of money, they assume (or pretend) such taxes are efficient ways of collecting public revenue and/or of advancing the home economy. They are neither, because they increase production and living costs for *all* home producers and consumers, reduce the earnings of labour and capital, and increase the need for poverty relieving public expenditure.

Since 1886 Henry George's book *Protection or Free Trade* has provided clarity for people wishing to understand tax and trade issues and how they relate to the just and efficient production and distribution of wealth - nationally and globally. This term's Friday evening classes at Mandeville Place are focussed on it and are reminding me how urgent the need is for those in the media, academia and politics to better understand what is at stake and how it relates to world peace and the sustainability of our mother earth.

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