

Letter from the publisher

Land&Liberty

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PO Box 6408, London, W1A 3GY
ph +44 (0) 800 048 8537
e editor@LandandLiberty.net

Editor John Triggs
Executive Editor Lars Rindsig
Consultant Editor Peter Gibb
Publisher Henry George Foundation
Contributors Bart Dunlea, W.R. Elliott,
Tommas Graves, John Howell, John Lipetz,
John Loveless, Robin Smith
Editorial support David Chester
Distribution Michael Learoyd

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Land&Liberty aims to explore how our common wealth should be used—and to demonstrate that this is the key to building the bridge of sustainability between private life, the public sector and our resources—between the individual, the community and the environment. **Land&Liberty**—putting people at the heart of economics.

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THERE IS apparently some doubt about the story that Nero played the fiddle while Rome burned during the great fire of AD 64. No such doubts for us though. We are faced with a general election and crises galore but our political leaders, commentators, pundits and most of us continue to fiddle.

We know that our fiddling lifestyles are unsustainable and cannot be made available to the vast majority of people that share the planet with us. We ignore the link between the politico-economic arrangements that our forefathers devised and saw adopted throughout the world and the cheap food, clothing, manufactured goods and fuel that are produced for us by people living in less rich countries.

Genuine trade between willing and free individuals brings benefit to both parties and harms no one, but the systems we operate have not led to universal prosperity. On the contrary poverty, pauperism and debt have become normal for many in both rich and poor countries. An insecure dependency prevails. People in poor countries are obliged to produce for people in rich countries rather than for themselves but cannot afford to purchase what those in rich countries produce. At the same time people in rich countries are obliged to buy what people in poor countries sell, since they cannot earn a living producing them themselves. So where are we going wrong? In short the answer is a failure by governments to discharge their responsibilities for the management of land and money and understand their implications for earnings and trade.

In economic terms the poorest workers in society are the most important, because what they are able to earn sets a datum of earnings to which all others relate. Simple observation shows a pressing need for the simplest of skills and care in society, and how its application adds value to people's lives and to public and private places. Other people with finer and less abundant skills add yet more value, producing—for example—quality food and clothing. Each such enterprise needs the support of our poorest worker as well as the services of professional specialists of one form or another. Critical to this specialisation, of course, is exchange or trade from the local shopkeeper to the international merchant.

Traditionally merchants did not need money to engage in trade—they needed credit. They paid their debts with the proceeds of their sales and traded both imports and exports in local money. They did not need an international currency. Today money and credit are virtually indistinguishable and currencies are unethically traded as if they were commodities like any other. As recent events have demonstrated, national governments back money that they allow private banks to create for commercial interests—their own. All this distorts the relative value of internationally traded goods and makes genuine free trade impossible. The taxation of labour and the products of labour do likewise, but the collection of rent does not.

As Henry George pointed out the coexistence of progress and poverty is not inevitable—except where economic justice is absent.

David Triggs
Executive Chairman
Henry George Foundation

[henrygeorgefoundation@
googlemail.com](mailto:henrygeorgefoundation@googlemail.com)

