

# Geoists in History

by Karl Williams

---

Welcome to a remarkable assembly of some of the greatest thinkers, reformers and philosophers in history. Although spanning many centuries and far-flung civilizations, these mighty figures were united in their belief that it's essentially wrong to own land and natural resources. The fairest and most productive means of sharing the Earth's bounty is to rent it according to its frequently assessed value, the proceeds of which are the proper source of public finance.

Very few of these geoists (deriving from geo, the Greek for Earth) had much in the way of contact with any of their fellows but rather came to their conclusions unassisted. Similarly, a startling number of our current Australian members had already arrived at geoist principles unassisted and were later amazed to find that there already existed formal organisations constituted to propagate these doctrines. While Henry George is generally considered to be perhaps the greatest proponent of geoism, he only rediscovered what many others had endorsed right back to biblical times.

In recent years, Progress magazine has begun to document some of the most noteworthy geoists in history, some of whom you'll recognise and some not. Each individual cultural perspective provides a fascinating insight into geoist principles, and these geo-blogs themselves are often inspirational. Here's a sample of the 63 we've featured over the last 16 years, with a few choice quotes:

**MARK TWAIN (1835-1910)** Celebrated American writer of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* fame who used his standing to promote the works of Henry George. "Give me the private ownership of all the land, and I will move the earth? – no, but I will do more. I will undertake to make slaves of all the human beings on the face of it."

**LEO TOLSTOY (1828-1910)** Russian writer, aesthetic philosopher and moralist who fearlessly attacked social inequality, coercive

forms of government and Church authority. "The only thing that would pacify the people now is the introduction of the Land Value Taxation system of Henry George. The land is common to all; all have the same right to it."

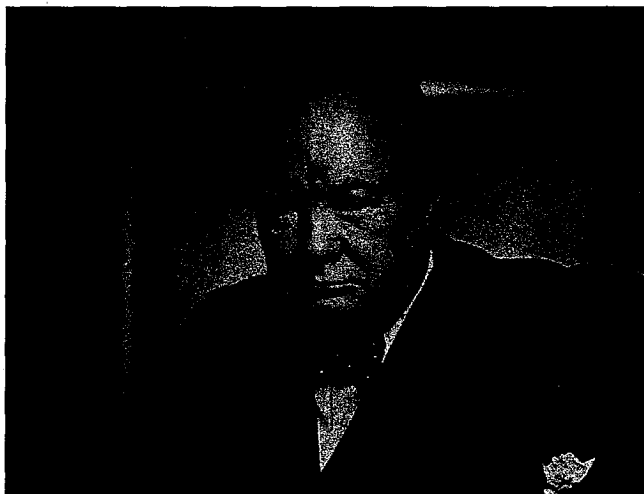
**JOHN STUART MILL (1806-1873)** English utilitarian philosopher who supported public ownership of natural resources. "Landlords grow rich in their sleep without working, risking or economising. The increase in the value of land, arising as it does from the efforts of an entire community, should belong to the community and not the individual who might hold title."

**CLYDE CAMERON (1913-2008)** Cabinet minister in the Whitlam government and Australian parliamentary delegate to the UN General Assembly "It is better to pay a small amount of land tax on your block of land than to pay a large amount in income tax and indirect taxation."

**JAMES LALOR (1807-1849)** Celebrated Irish nationalist and agitator for Irish independence. "I hold and maintain that the entire soil of a country belongs of right to the entire people of that country, and is the rightful property not of any one class, but of the nation at large."

**SUN YAT SEN (1866-1925)** Acknowledged by all sides as "The Father of the Chinese Revolution", he studied all possible economic systems with a view to having an independent China adopt the best. "The (land tax) as the only means of supporting the government is an infinitely just, reasonable and equitably distributed tax, and on it we will found our new system."

**BARUCH SPINOZA (1632-1677)** Dutch ethicist, rationalist philosopher and heretical theologian. "The fields and the whole soil ... should be public property, that is the property of him who holds the right of the commonwealth: and let him let them at a yearly rent to the citizens."



**WINSTON CHURCHILL (1847-1965)** Needs little introduction. Was a key author of the geoist "People's Budget" of 1909, ultimately defeated by the House of Lords. "It is quite true that land monopoly is not the only monopoly which exists, but it is by far the greatest of monopolies – it is a perpetual monopoly, and it is the mother of all other forms of monopoly."

**WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN (1876-1937)** One of America's greatest architects and the winner of the competition for the design of Canberra. Helped establish a home for the Australian geoist movement in Melbourne. "Henry George has given us our text to carry forward."

**ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894-1963)** Acclaimed novelist and English thinker, and an environmentalist well before that word was coined. In his preface to *Brave New World* he wrote "If I were to re-write this book I would offer a third alternative - the possibility of sanity. Economics would be decentralist and Henry Georgian."

**A.B. "BANJO" PATERSON (1864-1941)** Arguably Australia's greatest poet. "The present system is absurd and unjust, in that it enables some people to get a lot of benefit from the community to which they have no right, and it discourages industry and prevents production."

**ALBERT EINSTEIN (1879-1955)** Was also a crusading pacifist and an economic activist in favour of geoist reforms. "Men like Henry George are rare, unfortunately. One cannot imagine a more beautiful combination of intellectual keenness, artistic form, and fervent love of justice."

**HELEN KELLER (1880-1968)** Totally deaf and blind yet a tireless American reformer and an inspiration to millions. "Who reads shall find in Henry George's philosophy a rare beauty and power of inspiration, and a splendid faith in the essential nobility of human nature."

**THOMAS PAINE (1737-1809)** One of the recognised legends in the founding of the U.S.A. He was an author and revolutionary activist who took part in three revolutions. "Men did not make the earth ..... it is the value of the improvement only and not the earth itself, that is individual property .... Every proprietor owes to the community a ground rent for the land which he holds ... from this ground rent I propose to create a National Fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person a sum."

**DAVID LLOYD GEORGE (1863-1945)** One of the 20th century's famous radicals who, as British prime minister, fought for geoist reforms but was defeated by the landed aristocracy. "To prove legal title to land, one must trace it back to the man who stole it."

**JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704)** An Englishman respected as one of the great pioneers of political liberalism. "It is in vain in a country whose great fund is land to hope to lay the public charge on anything else."

**HENRY GEORGE (1839-1897)** Maverick, self-taught American economist who is held up by many as the greatest geoist - both in terms of writings and campaigning - to ever walk this Earth. "The tax upon land values is the most just and equal of all taxes. It falls only upon those who receive from society a peculiar and valuable benefit, and upon them in proportion to the benefit they receive."

**RICHARD COBDEN (1804-1865)** An English politician and economist who was leader of the free trade movement and tireless worker for international peace. "You who shall liberate the land will do more for your country than we have done in the liberation of its trade."

**MAX HIRSCH (1852-1909)** Prussian-born world traveller who settled in Melbourne and became our country's greatest geoist. "For the imposition of even a small tax on land values, ..... would

lower rents, induce a more efficient use of land, increase the demand for labour, and therefore tend to increase wages."

**WILLIAM PENN (1644-1718)** The Quaker peacenik who founded Pennsylvania on geoist principles to govern its system of public finances.

**STAMFORD RAFFLES (1781-1826)** The English scientist, explorer, diplomat, administrator, founder of Singapore and historian who elevated the prosperity of the Malays and Javanese by restoring their traditional geoist land laws.

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)** Prolific inventor, journalist, statesman, high public official, pioneering librarian, noted abolitionist, philanthropist and co-drafter of the American Declaration of Independence.

**THOMAS MORE (1478-1535)** English lawyer, writer and politician who opposed the Enclosures of the Commons. Better known as the "Man for All Seasons" - the principled idealist who opposed the extension of power (and its abuse) of Henry VIII and paid for this with his head.

**GERRARD WINSTANLEY (1609-1676)** English religious visionary and reformer who led the Diggers in their fight for the natural right to common ownership of land. "Give thy free consent to make the earth a common treasury, without grumbling; that the younger brethren may live comfortably upon earth, as well as the elder: that all may enjoy the benefit of their creation."

**JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)** A brilliant and unconventional thinker, this Swiss Francophone was one of the most influential Enlightenment figures, championing "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" decades before the French Revolution. "We ought not to reason about a land-tax in the same manner as about duties laid on various kinds of merchandise."

**CLARENCE DARROW (1857-1938)** This tireless champion of the underdog is probably the most acclaimed trial lawyer in American history. "Every man, woman and child adds to the wealth of the landowner; the others must secure land upon which to live, and they must bid with each other for the right to live."

**SIR RONALD EAST (1899-1994)** The longest serving public servant in Australia who worked mostly in water engineering. He was an environmentalist long before the word was coined. "With our system of land tenure, each generation pays an ever-increasing tribute to the landowner."

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1809-1865)** Almost all historians judge him as the greatest president in American history. "The land, the earth, God gave to man for his home, sustenance and support, should never be the possession of any man, corporation, society or unfriendly government, any more than the air or water."

**ARTHUR HENDERSON (1863-1935)** A low-born Scot who became leader of the U.K. Labour Party and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. "The taxation of land-values ..... seeks to open the way to the natural resources from which all wealth springs. The labour is here, and with it the will to work, but the land still lies locked in the grip of a tenacious and unrelenting monopoly."

**VOLTAIRE (1694-1778)** One of France's greatest writers and philosophers and the veritable embodiment of 18th century Enlightenment. "The fruits of the earth are a common heritage for all, to which each man has equal right."

**GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950)** An Englishman who became the most widely-admired English language essayist of the 20th century as well as the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*. "If giving the land of England back to the people of England is theft, I am quite happy to call it theft."

**THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826)** Author of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States. "Wherever in any country there are idle lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right."

**JACK CRAIGIE (1871-1966)** Prosper Australia's annual literary award is named after this devoted servant of The Cause, a long-time South Australian politician. "Unless a government distinguishes between communally and individually created values, it does not fulfil its true function in protecting the right of all the citizens."

**ADAM SMITH (1723-1790)** This Scot's magnum opus, *The Wealth of Nations*, is unquestionably the most important work on economics ever written. "A tax upon ground-rents would not raise the rents of houses. It would fall altogether upon the owner of the ground-rent, who acts always as a monopolist, and exacts the greatest rent which can be got for the use of his ground."

**FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT (1867-1959)** The father of 'organic architecture', this American was considered the most influential architect of this time. "Henry George showed us the only organic solution of the land problem."

**ALFRED WALLACE (1823-1913)** The audacious travels of this Welshman led him to become the co-discoverer with Darwin of the theory of evolution and natural selection. "Rent paid to the community, through state or municipal authorities, is the only system which is beneficial to the whole community."

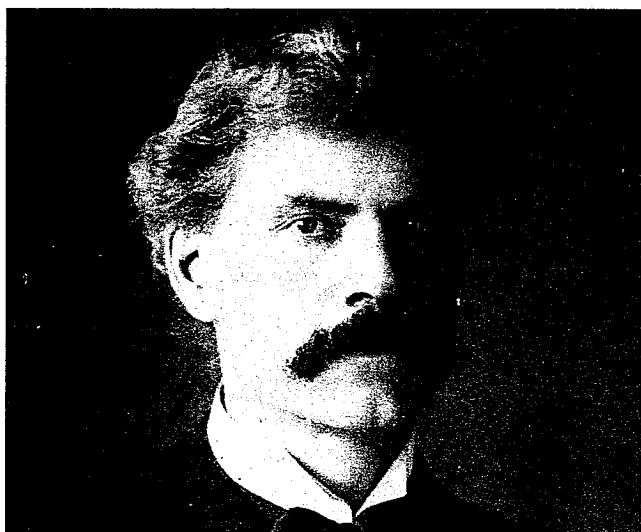
**WILLIAM VICKREY (1914-1996)** Pioneering Canadian mathematician who was awarded a Nobel in economics. "Use of land rents... for public purposes is therefore not merely an ethical imperative, as an unearned income derived from private appropriation of publicly created value, but, even more importantly, a fundamental requirement for economic efficiency."

**BERTRAND RUSSELL (1872-1970)** This English aristocrat earned fame as a philosopher, logician, mathematician, educationalist, Nobel laureate in literature, political theorist, historian, social reformist, and pacifist. "Every improvement in industry, every increase in the population of cities, automatically augments what the landowner can exact in the form of rent."

**ANDREW CARNEGIE (1835-1919)** The lowly-born Scot who became an American steel baron and the second-richest man in history also became the greatest philanthropist of all time. "The most comfortable, but also the most unproductive way for a capitalist to increase his fortune, is to put all monies in sites and await that point in time when a society, hungering for land, has to pay his price."

**PHILIP SNOWDEN** Twice Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer, he took on the might of the established land barons. "Every user of land

should be required to make an annual payment to the local government equal to the current rental value of the land that he or she prevents others from using."



**RAMSAY MACDONALD (1866-1937)** Three times the PM of the UK, he is still respected as one of the great pioneering pacifists in world history. "Differences of fertility and value of site must be equalised by rent, and it ought to go to common funds and be spent in the common interest."

**H.G. WELLS (1866-1946)** Prodigious English author, futurist, essayist, economist, historian, pacifist, literary critic, teacher, political commentator and widely recognised as the father of science fiction.

**JOHN DEWEY (1859-1952)** The acknowledged leader in American educational philosophy and the great pioneer of pedagogy, the study of being a teacher and the process of teaching. "No man, no graduate of a higher educational institution has a right to regard himself as educated in social thought unless he has some firsthand acquaintance with the theoretical contribution of this great American thinker [Henry George]."

**GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856-1950)** Radical in his politics and bohemian in his lifestyle, this Irishman is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature and an Oscar. "Economic rent, arising as it does from variation of fertility or advantages of situation, must always be held as common or social wealth, and used, as the revenues raised by taxation are now used, for public purposes."



**ALFRED DEAKIN (1857-1919)** One of the fathers of federation who later became Australia's 2nd, 5th and 7th PM and one of the key figures in Australia's federation. Highly respected by all sides of politics. "The whole of the people have the right of the ownership of land and the right to share in the value of land itself."

**HERBERT ASQUITH (1852-1928)** Long-serving British PM who founded the British welfare state and took on the House of Lords three times in attempting to have the People's Budget passed. "We hold, as we always have held, that local and national taxes which are necessary for public purposes should fall on the publicly-created value [of land] rather than on that which is the product of individual enterprise and industry."

**MIKHAIL GORBACHEV (1931- )** Nobel peace laureate and leader of the Soviet Union who oversaw its breakup, along the way introducing perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (freedom). "Natural rent must be a part of public revenue – what they don't earn but rather what they simply receive from the nation, from nature."

**RAE ELSE-MITCHELL (1914-2006)** NSW Supreme Court judge, royal commissioner, historian and office bearer on countless lofty panels. "Land policy must be directed to ensuring that landowners are restricted to gains from the development or use of land and are excluded from gains associated merely with the passive holding of land".

**CHIEF SEATTLE (1786-1866)** The very embodiment of indigenous nobility whose speech expressing respect for all creation became an anthem for the conservation movement.

**ROLLAND O'REGAN (1904-1992)** Prominent New Zealand surgeon, writer and campaigner for racial equality. "Maori society could have survived land confiscations but it could not survive the evils a fundamental change of land tenure were to bring. Freehold land tenure caused the death of Maori society as it had been."

**HENRY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN (1836-1908)** Perhaps Britain's first and only radical PM. "Let the value of the land be assessed independently of the buildings upon it, and upon such valuation let contribution be made to those public services which create the value."

**JOHN BRADFIELD (1867-1943)** The designer and builder of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, financed by geoist land value capture mechanisms.

No-one who's understood the set of principles that underpins geoism (or geonomics or Georgism, which are different names for the same thing) should be surprised to learn that it has been advocated by a multitude of glittering historical figures that transcend cultural practices or religious doctrines.

Take a moment to ponder the timeless and \*universal\* principles embodied here. On any planet on any galaxy, locations accessible to markets, weather, safety or teachers are obviously more desirable than those who don't. This is why we associate geoism with a natural law like gravity or entropy - it's always existed whether one acknowledges it or not, and if we try to live in defiance of the Law of Rent then we do so at our peril.

So join us each and every edition for more diverse accounts of geoists in history - there's a multitude in the pipeline. In the next edition of *Progress* we'll have Chaim Weizman, the first president of Israel and after that we'll review the life of the father of classical political economy, David Ricardo. Dozens more are still waiting in line, including Teddy Roosevelt, Bill Mollison (the co-founder of permaculture), Franz Oppenheimer, Joseph Stiglitz and Charles Darwin.

But the greatest geoists in history will be those who perform the ultimate service to the planet and bring about the widespread implementation of geoist sanity. Bring it on.