

# Roots Revolution

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For me, there are times when spreading the green gospel can seem like wading up to your nose in a sea of apathy and wilful ignorance, buoyed up solely by a slowly deflating faith in human nature. Sometimes it seems as if nothing short of a major catastrophe will penetrate the thick-skulled silent majority's complacency, upon which they will bestir their feeble minds and demand to know why they weren't warned. Then again, learning of yet another ecological cock-up, I sometimes feel if only we could accidentally release one of our marvellous new lethal diseases that only affect humans, is virulent, incurable and unbelievably contagious, what a happy place this earth would be; but it passes.

Then I wonder why it should be so. As a child, I remember being taught how the daring explorer, newly stepping onto some distant shore, could lay claim to an entire country, merely by plunging a flagpole into the beach and saying, in effect, "I was here first." It is quite possible to emerge from eleven years of compulsory education still believing in such fairy tales, which effectively mask the real processes shaping the world we live in. History shows nearly all movements for change concentrated in active, vociferous minorities, usually aligned with economic factions, but not always so. (The frequent peasants' revolts bore much of the character of riots rather than revolution). To paraphrase, the apathetic are always with us. Yet this isn't true when we travel further back into tribal society. Nineteenth century ethnological research is crammed with revealing accounts of tribal self-government, showing how we organised ourselves before we began to worship priests, politicians and princes. Greens are fond of buzzwords like decentralisation, responsibility for the earth, local democracy, community etc., yet very few seem to have any concrete ideas as to how to get there from here.

"Why don't our politicians make the world a better place for us," is the frequent pathetic bleat, heard all too often, both in and out of the movement. Is this not the self same leaders-and-led politics that greens claim to replace? This article is my attempt to cast off the sheep's clothing.

Personally, I've learnt more about revolution from my garden than anywhere else. Watching and working the soil, the many parallels between the processes of birth, health, decay and inter-relationship taking place in the garden, and those in human society, have convinced me that the only true and lasting changes must come from the roots up. In human terms, not the politics of leaders, but the experience of each individual in the running and living of their own lives. If you have nothing to be responsible for, you have little interest in the organisation of your needs. That apathy allows others to gain power over you by their assuming responsibility for your needs, power and responsibility being the two inseparable faces of the same coin.

Today most people have abdicated all responsibility for even their most basic needs, such as finding their own work, food, building their own shelter, making their own clothes, maintaining their own health, educating their own children; then turn around and wonder why they are treated as a commodity, why they have no influence in modern society. Then too, there is the seemingly inescapable shadow-face of civilisation; alcoholism, child abuse, the abuse of women, vandalism, mugging, abuse of privilege, corporate greed, racial hatred; the desperate catalogue of a society unnaturally caged in, the human zoo plucking out its own fur in vicious fistfuls. The labyrinthine complexity of our society seems to defy understanding, leaving us at the mercy of a whole gamut of enthusiastic saviours, from the therapist to the jackboot, each trading on little more than their own prejudices. Yet as a healthy person arises from a healthy environment, so a healthy plant grows from a healthy soil; then a healthy society must arise from - what? Strangely simple though it may seem, the structure of any society arises from its patterns of use and access to land. **We do not have a healthy pattern of land use.**

## **This crucial position of land and its ownership in modern society is a peculiarly misunderstood one.**

Today, the ownership of the earth, a concept once universally derided as ludicrous and immoral, is now not only honoured, but feverishly worshipped in every land. Billions grovel before tyrants who dispense morsels of the planet as rewards to their chosen servants, those deemed to serve both well and willingly. Any who are surplus to requirements, or unable to serve through age or disability are thrown aside, to perish in mind and body. The miserable few hundred square yards of earth that could support them, is denied them. The sacred and 'just' law of civilisation decrees that if we cannot pay for the earth, we must suffer the consequences, homelessness, hunger, sickness and death. A law obeyed in full by millions daily. The root cause of much of the world's misery, poverty, war, unemployment and famine, can be traced directly back to this same single abuse, i.e. the unlimited individual appropriation of the fixed resource of land, the sole source of all life. Any serious seeker of change, unless they first address this primary injustice, is a mere dilettante of revolution, and betrays all hope of achieving real freedom for anybody.

Harsh words, but sadly necessary. Even though these are brutally inescapable economic realities world-wide, they are so deeply entrenched in the fabric of every society, that we have become blinded to their true significance by that very familiarity. These are the simple facts: If you have no land to live from, you are dependent on money to purchase the products of the land; if you have no money to live from, you depend on employment; if you have no employment, then dependent on the State; if the State refuses you, you beg for the charity of the rich; no charity, you steal or die. Such is the chain which binds us to each other, and to the land. It is the entire spectrum of human economic existence, and none can escape it. A moment's thought reveals it is the rich, who by rationing the land, humanity's life-support system, actively create the helpless dependence in the rest of us on money, employment etc.

### **How has this come about?**

Historically at sword point; now maintained by a simple legal fiction, masquerading as Mosaic Law.

No matter how far our technology removes us from it, and refines its products, everything from computers to satellites, cars, ICBMs and TV's are all products of the land. Without exception, everything we use and consume either grows in the ground, or lies beneath it. In the USA, the richest 3% of the population own an incredible 95% of the land; in El Salvador 2% own 60% of the land; in S. Africa 5% own 86% of the land; in Britain as a whole, 2% own 74% of the land whilst 52% of Scotland is owned by a mere 350 families and institutions. Whilst the land, the only true source of independence, remains thus imprisoned, money is a mirage, employment is slavery, democracy is privilege, charity is injustice. We may no longer be hanged for stealing loaves of bread in dire necessity, but that too is only a legal fiction, a paper privilege often withdrawn in times of war and scarcity.

The "impartial" law of this nation, and of the world, states that although no mortal created the earth, and although no individual creates the rental value of the soil, nevertheless we shall all pay our rents to whoever is rich enough to demand them from us. Rent in this sense is not the mere cost of a home, but the wealth gathered to him who can say "This is my land, or my oil-field, my gold-reef, my mineral deposit, my sea, **and you must pay me if you wish to use them.**" He will then effortlessly become richer, enabling him to purchase the legal right to demand further rents, making him yet richer still, so he can collect even more rents, making him.....the land monopolist. Simple isn't it? **Money isn't power.** It's the legal right to purchase absolute ownership of natural resources, which is power. Ultimate power. Those who achieve wealth by the production of goods and services alone, are but the servants of those who own the earth, and are truly paupers by comparison. (Thus the financial might of the multinational conglomerate is due to their outright [land] ownership of the raw materials, together with lucrative land speculation, and massive up-market office space rentals, as much as actual production.)

Once started, this is a process which tends inevitably towards ever greater monopolies concentrated in the hands of ever fewer individual bodies, and since none of us can survive without making use of natural resources, we find ourselves increasingly powerless and insignificant beneath an ever more monolithic and anonymous tyrant. Why is there a dictatorial centralised government ruling in every nation? Why is there a world-wide movement towards ever larger economic units, entailing even the merger of sovereign states, as within the Common Market, and probably as the eventual fruit of East-West rapprochement? Whom does this really benefit? Why does famine-aid achieve nothing long-term; why is every wage increase met with a corresponding rise in the cost of living? Because the raw materials of life are controlled and priced by the tightest and most vicious monopoly known to history.

Because the land monopolist has 'gotten in on the ground floor', the cost of his demands are felt throughout the world economy. Every shop, every house, every factory and workplace stands on land which has to be bought or rented from the monopolist. Every manufactured item is made from raw materials whose cost incorporates the rental of the land they were produced from and/or extraction rights. Every service industry uses manufactured items and a workplace. All food is grown in the monopolist's soil. Every single time money changes hands, it includes a handout for the monopolist. A society which allows the land to be kidnapped from under its feet in this way, cannot honestly claim to represent freedom, economic or political. Its people are a crop, harvested to the bone by the privileged few in every nation.

### **Uproot a tomato plant and it dies.**

Uproot it and dangle the roots in a solution of nutrients flowing in a channel and you have hydroponics. Manipulate the nutrients and you can produce all sorts of tomatoes, big, small, many, yellow, green, blue - you have control. Uproot a person from the land that supports them, install them in a semi-detached, supply them with liquid credit, then sit back to await the ruddy fruits of their labours, threaten to turn off the money supply if they don't perform - you have control. Let them vote for a welfare state, unionisation, wealth tax, nuclear disarmament, poll tax, proportional representation, it makes no fundamental difference, you will always have control. They cannot vote to stop eating or sleeping or loving their children. They must take the work you offer - simply to live. If you have no need of them, ideally they'd curl up and hibernate in a cardboard box somewhere till the next economic upturn. No doubt genetic engineers are even now working towards this economic masterstroke, which will finally achieve prosperity for all (those still awake at least!). Meanwhile the unnecessary can exercise their democratic choice - to starve on their own two feet, or become a scrounger on the State's charity.

Conservatives fondly lament the 'dependency culture' which saps initiative, self respect and their own higher tax-band incomes, sanctimoniously screwing the faces of the helpless beneath their well-shod heels, whilst the loyal 'opposition' relish their own crack at the whip far too dearly to acknowledge the ultimate dependency upon which this society is founded, and through which silently draws its lifeblood. Constitutionally embedded between our feet and the ground we stand, lies the true, insatiable parasite, gobbling wealth, initiative and self respect from all but our wealthiest citizens, who are so by and large, solely by virtue of being the very stomachs behind its myriad mouths. The space between the leech and the whip is a very familiar one - it's known as work.

This work, that we are all indoctrinated from birth to alone value ourselves by, to pursue as an abstract value, devoid of any quality other than to have, or have not - what is its role in the great scheme of things as laid out for us by the powers that be?

Police, soldiers, prison warders, legal clerks, lawyers, bailiffs, tax-inspectors, all the expendable fingertips of state oppression, without whom the State would be powerless, all 'just doing their job,' though ever mindful of their own liquid credit status. Obviously these people would only reluctantly class themselves as wage slaves, thinking themselves superior to traditional stereotypes, say

assembly line workers in Digital, or Texas Instruments, chained by the clock to their sanitised, soulless task. But whether they as individuals enjoy their work or not, the fact remains that the restrictive monopoly of land is THE fundamental source of power for the State and monopoly Capitalist alike. Which is why no remedy can be expected from either quarter. The violent 'liberation' of the land is no answer either, for what has been taken by violence, will as easily be taken away again.

**There is however, a bloodless, perfectly constitutional means for cauterising this ancient parasite.**

Since the power of monopoly resides solely in his legal ability to collect the entire rental value of land to himself, to destroy it utterly it is only necessary for government to collect the rental value created by the bare land alone, wholly to the public purse. (This government MUST be decentralised, if we are not simply to exchange one monopoly for another, equally if not more dictatorial, as under State Communism). The greens have aptly christened this system of public finance, Community Ground Rent (CGR), proposing it as a replacement for the present system of taxing productive activity. Taxation as anciently conceived and currently practised, is the States infinitely flexible weapon for selectively oppressing its citizens, according to how it views its own priorities and objectives. Hardly a recipe for democracy or justice. In the rental value of unimproved (i.e. bare) land though, CGR has a finite, un- evadable and unique natural base, a value created by the democratic and self-adjusting demand of the whole community.

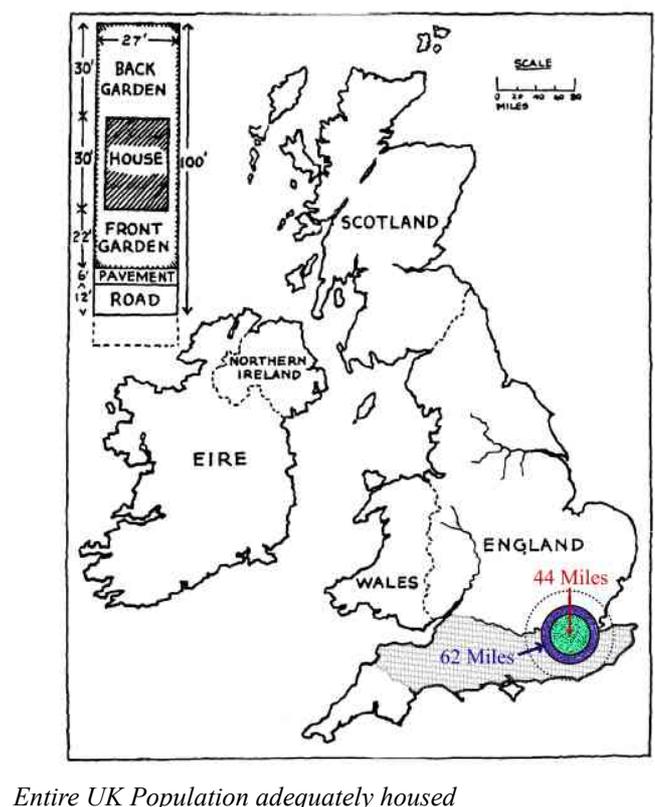
The first hurdle, in grasping the mechanics of this original system for equalising opportunity in life, is to realise that inhabited land acquires a distinct, measurable value entirely separate from the use made, or developed upon, that land. The most blatant evidence for this is the wide differential in housing prices across Britain, due entirely to unimproved land values, since the cost of construction varies but little from one place to another. Because this is a community created value, over which the monopolist can have no direct control, he is forced to resort to indirect manipulation. Since it is a demand-led value, the oldest trick in the book is to hoard supply, forcing prices up, a technique practised to obscenity with housing land today.

**But Britain is overpopulated we are told.**

By whom?. Try this: At a density of only eight dwellings, housing thirty two persons per acre (urban density is typically around two to three hundred per acre), the entire U.K. population could be housed within a 62 mile diameter circle, complete with 100 foot gardens in each dwelling and all service roads. We could all fit comfortably into N. Ireland three times over.

In 2012, the ONS published in their [UK Environmental Accounts](#) that the total proportion of England's landscape which is built on is 2.27%. Elsewhere in the UK, the figure shrinks to less than 1%. It is clear that only a small fraction of Britain has been concreted over. It's not the space we're short of, it's the land monopoly we're needing shot of, and how.

Assuming you own it, think how much your home cost. Depending on where you live up to 65% of that price is what you paid for the land underneath it. Think of a streetful of houses, add



up the value of the land under them all, then think of a whole city full of houses, factories, shops etc., add them up. Instead of being privately pocketed, creating poverty and inflation, imagine that money, as ground rents, funding hospitals, schools, welfare services, old age pensions. It could be done, CGR could replace all taxes. It can easily be locally administered, passing onto central executives only what the locality deemed necessary to fund those central functions. Revenue, and thus decision-making and accountability, would be turned on its head - decentralisation a reality, rather than an election ploy.

As CGR falls only on the unimproved land value, it must be paid for all land regardless of its use or development status. (These more properly belong with local planning authorities, sensitive to local needs). By this means, universal liability, CGR would unlock the millions of acres fenced away as private estates, empty houses and factories, speculative holdings etc. Wastefully used these will become an unbearable financial burden to their proprietors, instead of being the license to live at your neighbours expense, they now are. By abolishing income tax, and expensive farming subsidies, which are anyway almost entirely pocketed by landowners, not working farmers (the average British family pays 18 pounds 50 a week extra to support EEC food subsidies), and by ending the inflated monopoly value of land: economic, sustainable farming would be brought within the reach of more people, reducing food prices and increasing quality. Similarly, housing costs and business overheads would be dramatically reduced, making self-employment a more attractive option, releasing the energy and potential of millions of poor people now trapped and pigeon-holed as 'not needed on voyage' by our great western 'democracy.'

Millions of people no longer caught in a treadmill, endlessly trying to keep ahead of the debt man, simply to live. Land freely available at its true cost to any who can make good use of it, or who just wish to live more directly from it. Local government actually able to decide local priorities AND possessing the funds to implement those decisions without dictatorship from Westminster. Central government totally dependent on hand ups from local authorities, no central treasury forking out billions on state censorship and surveillance, secret projects, status weapons systems etc. No income tax, VAT, CAP, rates, only one single public charge, liability limited to the amount of the earth you fence off to call your own. A land where freedom could take a firm root.

Like all practical radical proposals, the vested interests, by filibuster and ridicule, violently oppose even the discussion of CGR and its potential, having long known and feared in it their nemesis. Their tame economists dismiss it as irrelevant without examination, since examination could not but demonstrate its validity. The overwhelming majority would substantially gain from its implementation, so public ignorance is the only safeguard. A widespread information campaign, high-lighting CGR as a real alternative to the medieval poll-tax proposals, could find much support, sufficient to establish a basis in local governments funding, as already exists in several countries which could later be expanded to fulfil its radical potential.

**Remember, this is no new imposition, but a radical redistribution.** Right now, with every single penny you spend, the community already pays its ground rent, straight into the well-lined pockets of the select band who, quite simply, are charging you the entrance fee to life on planet earth.

I hope this article has shown not only that our bodies, and all our possessions, are literally created of the soil, but that our laws and morals as to who should use the soil and how, also create, with equal finality, the skeletal framework around which our economic potential, and social tissue forms itself. Humanity may shake its technological fist in defiance, but the earth was, and will always, be here first. Land is still the root of all being; ignoring its realities can only lead to delusion and blind despair.

The tollbooths clustered beneath that ancient flag, barring the road up from the beach need dismantling, if humanity is ever going to advance beyond the discovery of slavery, and the consecration of greed, as the basis for civilisation.

*Steve James ~ originally published 1985.*

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NOTE: When first formulated over a hundred years ago by Henry George in his book "Progress and Poverty", this reform was phrased in terminology which has since changed its meaning in general speech. Thus, many of the organisations formed since then to spread his ideas still use the terms 'land value' and 'land tax' both in their titles and literature.

The conspiracy of confusion which land monopoly fosters, continually blurs the distinction between the improved locality, or site value, and the separate value resulting from the development of that site. Hence 'property', 'real estate' and 'land values' have all acquired the convenient (for the monopolist) imprecision of meaning which conceals the illegitimate theft of publicly created site value behind the legitimate private claim to development value. This has a further propaganda value in allowing the monopolists to claim that those who propose to finance public spending from the collection of ground, or site, rents are attacking the right to private property. In actual fact, under CGR, **all** private :property, including homes, wages, consumer durables, profit ;and personal capital will, **for the first time ever**, be wholly exempt from assessment for liability regarding public finance.

The term 'rent' is preferred to 'tax' on the grounds that the latter implies a prior personal right to the value of the bare earth, which in truth, carried no value at all until the community arose to give it one. 'Rent' also acknowledges the fact that, ultimately, we are all tenants on an earth we neither created nor can exist without.