

The Land for the People - of the World

- by Lindy Davies

Last June, a rusty freighter tottered onto a sandbar near the beach of Far Rockaway in New York. Its patient cargo caught sight of American shores and couldn't wait any longer. They swam for it. Seven died; five escaped (New York tabloids noted reports of "wet, disoriented people offering money to use the telephone") and the rest, some 280, were shipped off to detention centers. Sympathizers tried to send in a big order of Chinese take-out, judging that the newcomers might not be cheered by the Wonder-bread American-cheese sandwiches that were being provided; that hospitality was disallowed by the I.N.S.

It turns out that for some years the United States had been uncharacteristically lenient regarding Chinese immigration. Almost every Chinese person seeking political asylum was allowed in, and many aliens were allowed to slip through. Criminal gangs quickly saw the profit to be made, and began charging as much as \$30,000 to get each immigrant here - which, in most cases, was to be paid off in years of slave labor.

On turn-pikes through mountains, signs warn of falling rocks; "deer crossing" signs have proliferated in many wooded areas; but on the freeway outside of San Diego there are signs warning motorists to beware of crossing immigrants.

Meanwhile, middle America is in a panic. Jobs are going south! Manufacturers are finding lower costs of labor and regulation almost anywhere but here. There is a whole lot of boundary-crossing going on - of labor, and capital - and more to come.

Has anyone noticed how often questions and confusions of national sovereignty are cropping up in the news of late? Supposedly it is a perfectly stable, conventional concept: a nation's right to secure

borders. Politicians say it and people nod their heads. But there is - just beneath the surface - a general bewilderment about it. Here are a few prominent examples:

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait: a blatant attempt to seize the territory of a sovereign nation, met with Allied fortitude in the defining moment of the Bush presidency. It might be added, though, that Iraq's grievances included an infringement on its sovereignty involving a huge oil field on its territory which, because of a geological feature (and, perhaps, skillful boundary-drawing), Kuwait was draining at will.

There are many more: Japan's willingness to aid Russia in stabilizing its economy hinges on the return of the Kuril Islands, which have been under Soviet/Russian control since the end of WWII.

Puerto Rico grapples with the question of independence vs. U.S. statehood. Ti-

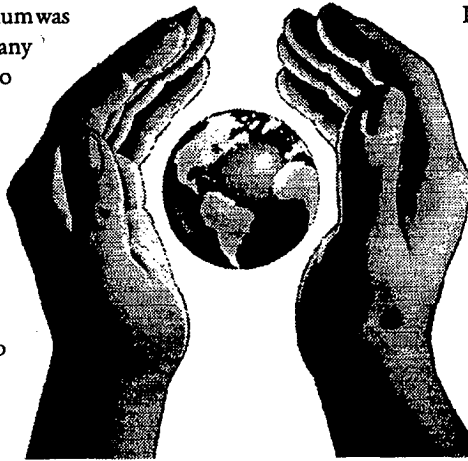
bet is still controlled by the invading force from China.

And the war in Bosnia is a blatant attempt to seize the territory of a sovereign nation (for Bosnia's boundaries, disputed and arbitrary as they

arguably are, are no more so than Kuwait's!)

Across the former Soviet Republics, including many that are still part of the Russian nation, ethnic factions are negotiating or fighting for national sovereignty. Their boundaries, inherited upon the breakup of the Soviet Union, were only vaguely connected with the areas in which the various "nations" historically lived. They were drawn with a concern for enforcing political stability within the planned economy and the controlled state of the Soviet Union.

In Africa, whose national boundaries were established, mostly, by colonial powers and reflect the former (continued on page six)



Henry George School Trustees Re-elected

At the annual meeting of the members of the Corporation of the Henry George School, Richard Barbuto, Herman Lazaar, Matthew Ossias, Heather Remoff, Stanley Rubenstein and Irving Starer were re-elected as Trustees of the School for the year ending January 1995. The Board of Trustees that governs the School is composed of these six, plus the nine Permanent Members, Steven Cord, William Davidson, Edward Dodson, Oscar Johannsen, Sydney Mayers, Paul Nix, Fryda Ossias, Constance Weinstein and Simon Winters.

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landholdings of various nations in Europe, tribal and nationalist rivalries have helped to make many countries all but ungovernable. Factions are beginning to call for some new version of colonial rule to straighten things out.

Then there are the sovereignty issues that constantly bedevil international trade negotiations. Developing nations, eager to nurture domestic industries, bristle at attempts to impose the safety and environmental standards of wealthier countries. Who are you to tell us what to buy, and from whom, and how much (or which sea mammals to kill, or what trees to cut)? Don't forget that we are a sovereign nation. Are they simply being obstreperous? Not quite: we ought to remember that industrial nations put out far more carbon dioxide per capita than developing countries do. Rather

than carping at their landless peasants for cutting down trees, perhaps we should be paying them to let the trees stand. After all, those trees provide a valuable pollution-reduction service.

And at home: recessionary times always strengthen the hand of protectionist politicians. It is always easier to defend farm subsidies on the grounds of patriotism than to oppose them in the name of international cooperation.

There is no escaping the fact that communications, travel and trade get easier all the time. This has made production both more efficient and more interdependent - and has tended to increase the polarization of rich and poor. It seems that the nations of the Earth today are on an uncharted course. The organization whose task it is to monitor and mediate all these develop-

ments, the United Nations, does its best - but the task is enormous and the proper direction is necessarily unclear because it is still evolving.

Here at the Henry George School we tend to look to the analysis of the "Prophet of San Francisco" for guidance on such matters. Can George help us on this issue?

Henry George regarded nation-states as perfectly suitable organs of civilization, having certain collective rights (such as restricting immigration) by virtue of their nationhood. That policy is implied in *Social Problems*, and stated explicitly in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison on the question of Chinese immigration in 1893. George had long been an opponent of the importation of "Coolie Labor" to work on railroads and depress wages in the US. Garrison, the old anti-slavery crusader, retorted that "The humblest Chinaman has as much natural right to use the earth of California as yourself, and it is your inalienable right to change your residence to any land under the sun." Henry George denied that assertion, replying "Are men merely individuals? Is there no such thing as family, nation, race? Is there not the right of association, and the correlative right of exclusion?"

It might be tempting to view these views of George's as racist or xenophobic. It is more likely, however, that their true source was his zeal in focusing on the true cause of exploitation and industrial depression: the land question. This point is shown in the biography by Henry George, Jr.:

...while approving of Chinese exclusion "under present conditions," Henry George could conceive of a state of things under which such a policy would not be necessary. In a lecture in San Francisco while writing Progress and Poverty he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is not only more important to abolish land monopoly than to get rid of the Chinese; but to abolish land monopoly will make short work of the Chinese question...."

It should be noted, however, that such things as the breakup of the Soviet Union or the increasing power of transnational corporations are beyond Henry George's experience. How, for example, are we to consider the national sovereignty of a nation like the Dominican Republic, where huge blocks of land are idly owned by foreign corporations, and almost half of the nation's people live packed in the capital city, where there are no jobs for them?

"But now wait a moment," you may say. "Nations have enough land for their people; it is just kept from them by the land barons. If each nation were to solve its own land problem, the inequities and exploitations that bring about the Golden Ventures (and the perilous San Diego freeway-crossings) would disappear."

AN INTERNATIONAL DECLARATION ON INDIVIDUAL AND COMMON RIGHTS TO EARTH

We hereby declare that the earth is the common heritage of all and that people have natural and equal rights to the land of the planet. By the term "land" is meant all natural resources.

Subject always to these natural and equal rights in land and to this common ownership, individuals can and should enjoy certain subsidiary rights in land.

These rights properly enjoyed by individuals are:

1. The right to secure exclusive occupation of land.
2. The right to exclusive use of land occupied.
3. The right to the free transfer of land according to the laws of the country.
4. The right to transmit land by inheritance.

These individual rights do not include:

1. The right to use land in a manner contrary to the common good of all, i.e., in such a manner as to destroy or impair the common heritage.
2. The right to appropriate what economists call the Ground Rent of land

The Ground Rent is the annual value attaching to the land alone apart from any improvements thereon created by labor. This value is created by the existence of and the functioning of the whole community wherein the individual lives and in justice the property of the community. To allow this value to be appropriated by individuals enables land to be used not only for the production of wealth but as instrument of oppression of human by human leading to severe social consequences which are everywhere evident.

All humans have natural and equal rights in land. Those rights may be exercised in two ways:

1. By holding land as individuals and/or
2. Sharing in the common use of the Ground Rent of land.

The Ground Rent of land can be collected for the use of the community methods similar to those by which real estate taxes are now collected. That is what is meant by the policy of Land Value Taxation. Were this community created land value collected, the many taxes which impede the production of wealth and limit purchasing power could be abolished.

The exercise of both common and individual rights in land is essential to society based on justice. But the rights of individuals in natural resources are limited by the just rights of the community. Denying the existence of common rights in land creates a condition of society wherein the exercise of individual rights becomes impossible for the great mass of the people.

WE THEREFORE DECLARE THAT THE EARTH IS THE BIRTHRIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE.