

A fast learning curve

How is the reality of being a Councillor different from what you thought it would be like?

I had a reasonable insight as to what being a Councillor involved to the extent of what issues I had to deal with, but the reality of the amount of work involved I don't think you can fully appreciate until you have embarked on that journey. I now appreciate much more the effort and time taken or put in by previous Councillors, particularly Anudhi [Wentworth] and Rhonda [Ellis] who were in a minority in the last Council. But in many respects it is a very interesting undertaking, I am interested in the material that we are dealing with and the issues that we are dealing with.

I feel that things are slowly starting to change around and we are having some impact but at the same time in many respects it is a bit of a joke. I believe that being a Councillor in Byron Shire is basically a full time job or at least should be recognised as a full time job, because to do the position justice requires a serious amount of time and dedication and for that reason I think it should be recognised as a full time job and paid accordingly.

However, this is a matter of state government and we can't just decide to pay Councillors a full time wage. Also many people might think this is a big gripe as we are getting twice or three times the amount as previous Councils, but in no way does that compensate for the efforts that this current Council is putting in. I believe that Byron Shire is really lucky in terms of the amount of effort that people are putting in.

I do find it quite interesting – last year went very quickly – but at the same time it is a thankless task and you cop it in the neck no matter which line you take. I think we are getting somewhere and hopefully the ethos is beginning to turn around a bit in Council.

Do you think state government gives local government the resources it needs to function properly?

In a word, no. Local government is at the cutting edge of providing services to the community – basically it is local government's responsibility to provide all services to the community on an everyday level anyway and provide most of the infrastructure. But we are now faced in Byron Shire with the problem of too small a rate base or too small a number of ratepayers to provide the services that people want, and what we need to do for the Shire.

To be perfectly honest I think that to have three tiers of government is an extravagance. With the coming of republicanism it would be much more appropriate to abolish state government and to have only the federal government and local government system, to have two tiers of government. The funding that would then be available, with the huge amount of money that is spent on state government and their different projects made available for local government, would make far more resources available for different projects on a local level.



**Ian Hosken talks to
The Echo about his
first year as a Byron
Shire Councillor**

Realistically speaking, the state government is not going to relinquish the reins immediately and Council, as you say, has a very small base of income from rates and your other income has just been discovered as being extremely suspect, so how do you see Council getting out of this impasse?

State government isn't going to relinquish the reins of power without a big struggle, and for us to get out of this impasse is a difficult question. The previous Council under the direction of the ex-general manager Max Eastcott thought the solution was to develop our way out of the problem, to collect Section 94 contributions which were going to pay our way around the matters that we needed to spend money on.

So that is what happened: basically we overspent on different community projects, projects that I am sure are appreciated by the community – apart from possibly the Council chambers which may not be very appreciated by a significant portion of the community. But the money to build a considerable part of the Council chambers, Ocean Shores community centre and the Sandhills preschool, to name a few, were going to be paid for by Section 94 contributions which hadn't actually been collected. It was on paper that this amount of development would happen and so this amount of money would be available to pay for these projects. Which is not very good business sense – you don't spend money before you've got it.

You were talking about the ethos of Council turning around, and obviously there has been some conflict in the early stages between the so-called green and the so-called right wing elements in Council. Do you see that as a situation that will resolve itself?

I don't really see that there is going to be much resolution between the right wing Councillors and between the so-called green Councillors. I think that we started

out our term fairly optimistic that we could resolve some of the differences that existed but as time has gone on it would seem that if anything the gulf is broadening.

Initially we were optimistic as to maybe making some inroads into healing or at least narrowing the gap between our ideologies, but there are huge differences between what we think should happen in this Shire (or what some of us think should happen – you can't just throw everybody into one basket or the other, there is some middle ground there) and what the right wing want to happen here. Never the twain shall meet in the long run. Because I think basically, if we are talking in terms of planetary healing and the good of this country and the betterment of the people who live in this Shire, then the direction we are talking about is social responsibility and environmental responsibility. I don't think that we should be going down the line of destroying this area for short term gain because that's the economic ethos that we have been fed for ever and a day.

Planning is a major issue. Do you feel you have been able to get a grasp on the planning issues and had enough time to look at them with planning experts?

We are only now starting to get a real handle on the planning issues. The difficulty is that we really need the assistance of expert staff, which equates to time, resources and money, and the bottom line is money, so for us to really address many of the issues, like the ESD DCP, we need to have the capital to put in to do that, because the staff is very occupied as it is. The planning department of Byron Shire is understaffed in my opinion, particularly the strategic planning department, but given the resources I think we have done an incredible amount.

The ESD LEP or the '88 LEP has now been modified, that's on public exhibition, and that's addressing the fundamental issues of ecologically sustainable development. There have been minor amendments, 60 or 70 minor amendments, made to the DCP and the LEP which will see quite significant changes within both those documents. The rural residential strategy and the urban residential strategy are both being reviewed. I believe what is going to come out of that will be quite important and we will see a completely different direction for future growth in this Shire.

So I think we have significantly addressed the planning issues. The difficulty in many respects is that when it comes to everyday developments it is very difficult to address planning issues. We as a Council last year spent considerable time dealing with individual DAs. Whilst morally and philosophically we may not agree with those particular developments – and obviously major developments and things of high social impact and environmental consequence should go before Council – I think we should be dealing more with changing the DCP, because that is where we can have effective change.

But herein lies a problem: because

of the state government, we have got a 40 day deemed refusal thing to contend with, and we have got Section 90 considerations to contend with, which don't really address the full impact of some developments, such as how much impact urban development is having on our sewage treatment works. Because when an area is already zoned urban we are basically over a barrel. We may be aware that it is impacting on our inadequate sewage treatment works, but legally we don't have the opportunity to say that that can't happen. That's not to do with Byron Shire Council, that is to do with state government, the Land and Environment Court, and that is a frustration.

You would like to see a paradigm shift in the state planning instruments?

I think that we as a Council, or local government generally, are on the cutting edge of what is happening in an area, in their particular area, and they are the bodies that should be more fully aware of impact on our waterways and our environment generally. I don't believe that we are given the opportunity to fully consider that and yet the EPA which sets the guidelines



the group of six or seven of us in Council work together. To me it is quite satisfying that we have got a Council where we do have a voting pattern. It's not always 6-3 or 7-3 or 6-4, but on many of the important issues that is the voting pattern. Basically I think that the majority of people on this Council do have the best interests of this Shire and community at heart, and through a roundabout way we are managing to achieve that by a lot of the things that probably a lot of people in the community aren't aware about as yet.

Also I think with regard to all committees that involve community representatives that all the community is really very enthusiastic about what is going on. Although it is a hard thing for people to continue

What issues would you like to see resolved in the rest of Council's term?

The question of our rural strategic plan is fairly advanced, we are making considerable inroads in that regard, so that is going to come out before long. We are now considering the residential strategy because basically the old residential strategy is a disaster and a recipe for the urbanisation of 50% of Byron Shire. I personally don't want to see any more traditional subdivision that leads to urban sprawl as we have seen to this point because I believe that the majority of people in this Shire voted us in to prevent that.

Addressing ecologically sustainable development is a far reaching question. It really goes to all our practices, as to how we live as a community. What do we do with our rubbish? We have to seriously address our solid waste management. The state government is saying by the year 2000 we have got to have 60% of our green waste taken out of the waste stream. We really have to get on top of that and I think we can manage that.

We are now looking at composting sewage sludge with green waste: that's a major step in the right direction. The Brunswick River and the health of our waterways is a crucial question, so somehow or other we have to get around the issue of upgrading the current sewage treatment works to the point of dealing with the number of people that exist now without allowing those to be upgraded to the point of allowing a whole bunch more people's effluent to go into them. That is a very crucial issue.

I suppose the most immediate question we have to address before we do anything is to get around our financial woes, because unless we do that we may not continue to exist as a Council, which would be disastrous.

There has been some talk about Byron Shire Council being absorbed into Ballina or into Tweed. In my opinion that would, one, be disastrous, two, would only happen if we continue down the path of financial irresponsibility and continue with the deficit that we have and, three, I think there would be a huge hullabaloo if that actually looked like becoming a reality. It would make the demonstrations against Club Med look very insignificant.

Our financial situation has to be addressed immediately, we have to become more entrepreneurial as a Council, we have to look to other areas of getting some money, we can't think that it's going to come from the state government, much as I think they have some responsibility. But we can't also continue to hit the ratepayers of the Shire. The effect that tourism is having on this Shire, because this area is promoted

'We have to address our financial woes because unless we do that we may not continue to exist as a Council.'

for how much you can pollute waterways is setting the Section 94 considerations to the effect that we have to allow development to happen even though it is impacting on our waterways through our inadequate sewage treatment works.

What are the main joys and disappointments you have experienced over the last year in relation to Council?

Good question. I think although it was a major battle and a really big struggle and some very difficult times encountered, the main thing was that we finally as a group found the strength to deal with the question of negotiating the departure of the general manager. We weren't going anywhere with the ex-general manager, we were running on the spot, it was very frustrating and we were under a continual barrage of pressure to do something about this.

The right wing would say that we succumbed to that pressure. I think we considered this issue for a long time and we made the right decision. This was vindicated by the financial position that was revealed a month or two after the departure of the ex-general manager and the question as to how we got there. That was a major turning point.

Another major thing for me was that after considerable to-ing and fro-ing and lobbying we finally got to a point of at least recognising that we will consider onsite effluent disposal systems in urban areas of the Shire. That means that now we can more seriously look at how we can deal with our effluent onsite in urban areas, but obviously the proposal still has to meet Council standards.

Another very joyous thing is how

their support and enthusiasm over a four year period, generally we are a part of a very keen and very smart and alert society - more so than anywhere else in Australia and possibly the world. That is very encouraging, and it would be a totally thankless task if you didn't have the support of the community in thinking that what you were trying to do was being well received.

So now that Max has gone, how are the staff reacting to the change?

Initially there was a major shock for many of the staff, and possibly it looked straight after his departure as if we may not have had a Council or a staff to work with as a Council. That was a considerable worry and Max somehow or another, I'm not sure how, did command considerable loyalty amongst the staff. He was one of those characters with quite a magnetic personality.

I think now the situation has turned around. The acting general manager Mark Norris has in my opinion played a considerable role in changing the attitudes of the staff around, and the Council's persona in general. I think he is doing a very good job and the feedback I've had from the community is that he is very responsive to queries and enquiries and does his best to answer people's questions.

My perception is that there is quite a considerable turnaround in attitudes of staff and maybe a lot more enthusiasm for what we are trying to do. The proof of the pudding will be in this coming year as to what was the impediment to getting things done and whether we can get things done more easily this year.

File Pan Lou - Gabriel

Gauth (+ ~~Marie~~ B) now staying
at Katrina's. He has recently
been an advisor to Minister
for Social Services.

in Cai 5/5/97

File Pan Lou

ParCom File

Bodhi.

8/3/98

Greta went to Council earlier for info & questions - viz procedure re

- charge a bld site - or if approved
- new site - not on (& "who do we think we are")
- request to photocopy stuff from "our" file - denied, but could read.

Approval given to him to build a 1 room dwelling/structure at a site of his choice without Council approval including clearing for orchard trees around the structure.

Seen to be by the Forum a "temporary" structure & if questioned a 'shed' in which he sometimes slept!!

No mention made at meeting of availability of Council Temp Bld licence.

No provision or request for road access or bush fire provisions.

Assumed by Deirdre to be conditional on burying poly pipe to site.

6/10/78

Pen Com

Andrew Scaplan P91036
Lives in Tintable Co RI (near ^{school} school)

Doing ^{4 yrs} Ed 800. One yr project

on alternative educ. ~~values~~,
attitudes & beliefs & desired outcomes

drawing on mo family study.

(Doing selected families case study
in 3-7 yr age range viz pre-
primary school)

Thesis to be in by Nov '78

○ "indigenous communities"

Ex Simon Clough to me.

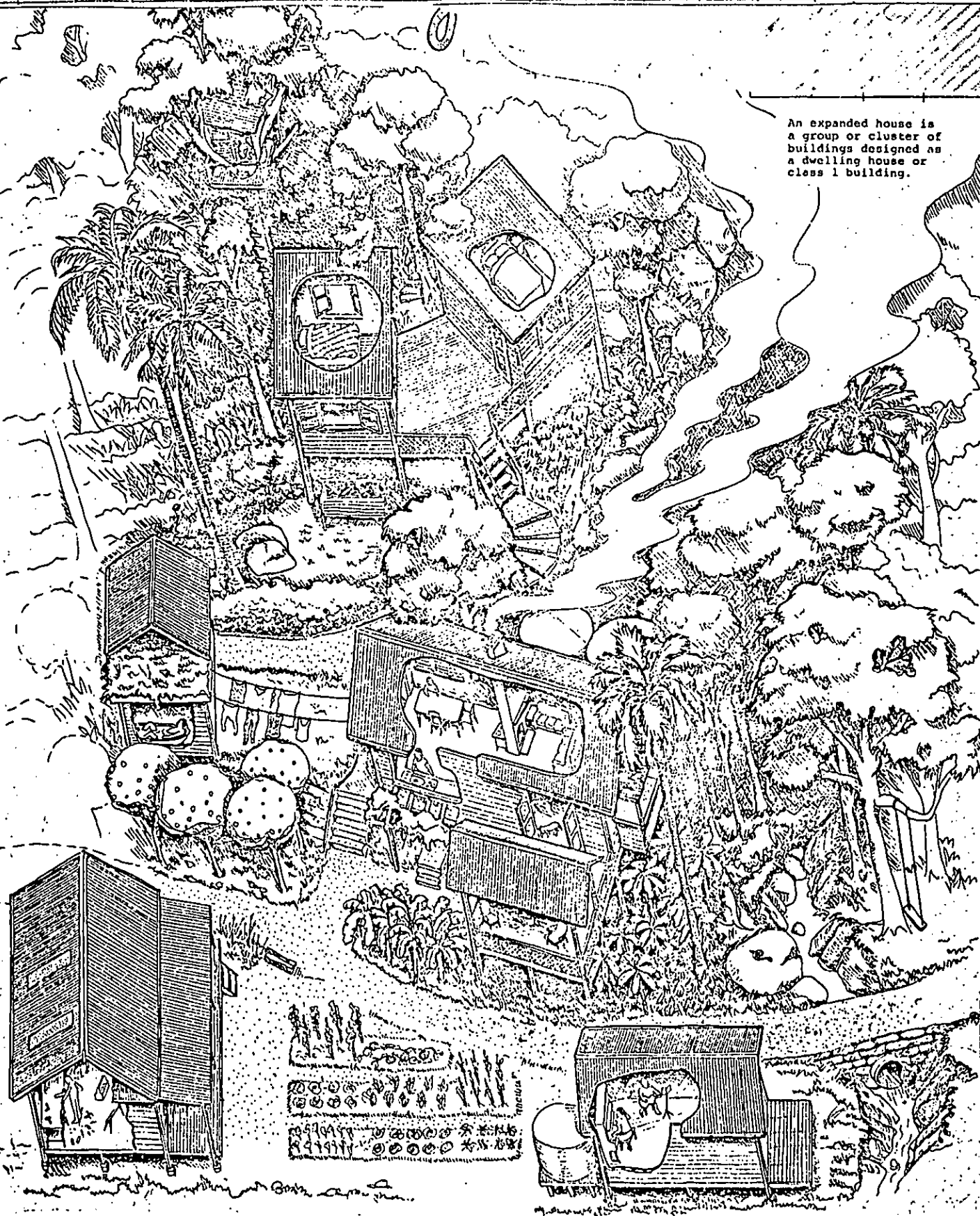
He plans to contact Anne McW & Tintable

Pres & Primary schools

LOW COST COUNTRY HOMEBUILDING HANDBOOK

Dept. of Environment & Planning

An expanded house is a group or cluster of buildings designed as a dwelling house or class 1 building.



LAND TAX REVISITED

A Personal View of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and the Georgist Movement by Alan Ecob

During 1997 Alan Ecob has, on behalf of NSW ERA, been responding to Richard Giles of the Association for Good Government about the relevance of Henry George's ideas today. This paper was written to provide a basis for dialogue. Richard Giles' response is also included.

I must confess to being an inveterate fan of Henry George and his *Progress and Poverty*, 75th Edn. 1962. As an economic argument, the work was accused of 'panacea simplicity' by John A. Hobson in *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, UK, 1938. Yet for me it is the source to which I return when I wish to recharge my faith in justice and the future of human society. The recent introduction by the NSW Government of land tax on residential land worth \$1 million or more and on rental properties whose land value is \$160,000 or more, causes it to be a current issue.

Historical Background

First published in 1879 in the USA, *Progress and Poverty* had by the early 1900s become a world-wide best seller. George toured the world addressing large throngs in town halls. The concept of levying property taxes on the unimproved rather than the improved capital value of land was adopted to varying degrees in a number of countries, including Australia particularly in Canberra. What had become a major international movement was however sidelined by World War I. The post-war social atmosphere proved to be of a very different kind, being best remembered today as the excesses of the 1920s. Post World War II the movement was given a new lease of life by an American businessman Robert Schalkenbach who donated major funding into a Foundation (in his name) to propagate George's ideas world-wide. Inflation however has however seriously eroded this legacy. Today the torch is carried by organisations like the Sydney-based Association for Good Government.

The Problem & The Remedy

"The present century" stated George "has been marked by a prodigious

increase in wealth-producing power".

From this we should expect the lives of even the poorest to be the realisation of the golden age of which we have always dreamed. Yet the 'tramp' comes with material progress. Social division forces an immense wedge, not beneath society, but through society. The association of poverty with progress is "*the enigma of our times*". This statement was made more than a century ago! Further growth in "*technology and wealth producing power*", to use George's words, has been exponential. Yet the problem remains unchanged. It continues to be the greatest enigma of our time.

George's remedy was expressed as but one sentence "*We must make land common property*".

Simple as it may have been, but it had and continues to have fundamental societal implications. To appreciate these we must first envisage the potential application of the remedy. In a democratic society familiar with the advantages of a free market-place, this application could most conveniently be effected by having our government issue, not freehold leases, but term leases for all land (both land and natural resources and with zoning normally fixed for the term of each lease.) for market-bid rates of rentals payable.

The application of such an approach to an initially undistorted situation (as visualised in the USA in 1879 by George) may well have been conceptually simple. Yet in our modern (and by comparison, distorted societies) applications would result in a number of controversial implications :-

- 1) Should the remedy apply to private homes? If not, ever increasing economic distortion could be anticipated.
- 2) Should the remedy also apply to man-made natural resources such as reclaimed land; to the 'multiplication' of land as by the construction of multi-storied factories; by any and all physically-real capital investment? Any accounting partition of value (separating improvements from 'raw' land) in such

cases would provide a fertile field for huge economic distortion.

3) Should the remedy apply to financial-only capital investment values, which in accounting principle, may be held to be of the same economic effect as 2)?

4) And finally, at the far end of the spectrum from which we commenced, should it not apply also to essentially speculative financial-only investment, as with (for example) the purchase of derivatives contracts based on future price movements in commodities prices, exchange rates, and 'real securities'?

If pushed all the way to include these four implications, George's Remedy is nothing other than a prescription that all economic rent (the reward of monopoly, oligopoly and indeed, all other than perfect competition) of all kinds and all sources should be appropriated by government period by period as the 'natural' measure of public revenue. *All other taxes should be abolished*. Such is the comprehensive 'single tax' prescription.

Of course, if pushed 'all the way' the Remedy is, from a practical point of view, little more than the logical observation that if you can eliminate all economic distortion, you will then have a distortion free economy. This does not set any banners waving.

But what does set banners waving in the late 1800s was a combination of George's imprecision, plus his claim that 'land is the mother of all monopolies'. What emerged was his conviction that one did not need to tackle all four categories simultaneously. All one needed to do was to first apply the remedy to *Land alone* (where in a sense kings and governments have always had the power to do so) to acquire economic rent proper; then in due course all the economic rent rewards of all other monopolies etc. (quasi-economic rent), would accrue to land values automatically and thence become captured by subsequent rental rebidding. Eureka! The enigma has been resolved! All that remained to be done was to convince the Government to implement the Remedy.

The rest is history. It didn't happen.

Could it Have Worked ? Then and Now.

Then :

In the frontier-dominated USA of George's boyhood, his vision of a wagon-train rolling westward and establishing the village centre of what was to become a great city in the midst of limitless natural resources provided the initially undistorted situation in which his Remedy may have worked. Whether his Remedy, in the absence of World War I, would have proven to be politically saleable in the teeth of contrary vested interests is debatable. But it could have worked. And if it had been adopted, what a different world today ours would have been.

Now:

The situation today is that the ratios of the key economic rent flows have changed irretrievably :-

1) In the USA of the late 1800s, the ratio of economic rent proper to quasi economic rent may well have been in the order of 10:1. The principle sources of "unearned" income were from :

- Past enclosure of land, then selling it in the now burgeoning market place (as the supply of unappropriated land began to dry up);
- resale of land for speculative profit, both outright and as sale of natural product;
- speculation indirectly based on ownership of land.

In such a situation, the incidence of quasi-economic rent was a relatively minor matter.

2) In the USA and the whole of the western capitalist world today, the ratio has been approximately reversed to 1:10.

- The economic value flows resulting directly from the ownership of land are now not a minor proportion of those resulting from the daily trading on our stock exchanges of the equities and debt instruments which represent the major capital wealth of the world. Even if this were the only measure, the proportion represented by flows from land would be less than 1:5.
- Yet the above is now being approximately equalled by the profit flows resulting from the world market in derivatives contracts, which in essence simply speculate as to the future price movement in the above capital wealth. The overall ratio is therefore some 1:10.

Conclusion for Today

In our speculatively charged world economy, it must be evident that a single tax raised in the USA or Australia today on land values alone could not appropriate as government revenue even 10% of the aggregate flow of economic rent as being secured by our myriad forms of speculation and partial monopoly. Furthermore, any attempt to do so would result in an immediate flight from land values into the capital values of all the other sources including overseas.

The 'Community Charge' in Australia ?

To assist us to distinguish the possibility of a single and remedial land tax from what presently is being charged under that name by our NSW State Government we may note that the Sydney Georgist movement proposes what they describe as a 'community charge' to be progressively implemented over what presumably may be a generation. For the reason of flights in values such a proposal :-

a) Could not be half-hearted.

Realistically, it would have to cover all

major sources of economic rent, and have balanced, evenly distributed economic impact from day one and throughout every stage of its implementation.

b) Would have to be implemented in step with the detailed agreement of our major trading and financial partners.

From a purist Georgist perspective the question becomes - what figures would become relevant to a full national adoption of a 'community charge' single tax as applied to land and natural resources alone (assuming no flight in values, and no external changes) ? The following approximate answer is derived from *Australian National Accounts 1991-4* (Ref.3) extrapolated to 1997-8 (all figures in \$ billions) :-

1. GDP Australia	\$ 500
2. Govt revenue 33% GDP	\$ 170
3. Commercial land cap. values	\$ 700 approx.
4. Domestic land cap. values	\$ 500 approx.
5. Natural resources cap. value	\$ 400 (guess)
6. Land cap values 3+4+5	\$ 1,600
7. Percentage of 2. to 6.	= 11% p.a.

The evident conclusion is that levying a 11% tax on land capital values, even with abandonment of all other taxes, would have a dramatic effect on flights of value and external complications. Such a policy, even if implemented progressively over time, would result in economic chaos. The fact that Henry George's 'single tax' concept offers no credible solution to our present day economic enigma is no reason to ignore its power as a fundamental moral thought, and its demonstration of the immorality of so much of our present tax 'initiatives'. The government policy of 'if you see substantial value, grab a slice of it regardless, is incredibly destructive of social cooperation for mutual advantage which must be the foundation of any superior civilisation.

IN REPLY : UNDERSTANDING 'LAND TAX'

Response by Richard Giles, Secretary, Association for Good Government

In mid December the NSW Government placed a tax on residential land worth more than \$1m provoking the attention of the press and television. For the first time in ages this tax was seriously and sometimes favourably reviewed. In an

age of the electronic transfer of money, transfer pricing, family trusts and personal companies, all used successfully to minimise tax, a tax base that was immovable and highly visible like land seemed to be worth investigating.

In the brief space there is to address Alan's personal views about 'land tax', the best approach is just to give you a framework that might help you evaluate what Alan has said.

Land Values

Of course it is not land that is taxed but land values. Henry George set out to show that, whichever way you looked at it, land values should be the object of taxation.

In the first place land values represent the value of location. It is not land for the most part which has value; it is the location or position; and that position represents the value of what is around land. Land has no intrinsic value; its value is taken from its surroundings. Land value is the market value of the environment.

The landowner does not produce land, and he does not produce its social environment; he charges for access to them. Laying a public charge upon access to better land - not land nationalisation - offers a revenue to government that is not founded on confiscating the rewards for labour. It is a charge upon the unproductive "activity" of simply owning land. Whereas taxing productive effort reduces the supply of labour, "taxing" land increases its supply by putting a holding charge upon it. It opens up valuable land to use; and penalises land speculation. Land values are the effect of human cooperation.

Economic Rent

Economic rent can loosely be described as the surplus earning over what is needed to retain the supply of a good or service. More precisely, rent is really the earnings which come, not from one's own efforts, but from a prevailing condition which facilitates labour eg fertility of land, proximity to markets. Being a surplus return it may be "taxed" without causing economic distortion.

Of course the *Land* we are talking about encompasses all natural opportunities even air waves or space. People pay high prices to a better location; the rent is already there. It must be collected to give everyone equal land rights.

The failure of government to collect 'rent' of land is the primary distortion in the economy, creating a madhouse of economic illusions or false appearances. To leave a madhouse is easy enough. A system to collect all rents, natural or artificial ones, is easy enough to invent. But society finds it hard to abandon old habits even if they are crazy.

For those who are interested we are holding an introductory course of four weeks beginning Wed 11 February. To enrol ring me on (02) 9744 8815.

(Richard Giles indicated he was interested in exploring whether the issue of land tax and interest-free credit from government could be integrated. This will be further investigated. But a few issues stand out. The idea that land has no inherent value will come as a shock to those who feel the land is sacred and that our proper relation to the land is not that of owner, but that of custodian. However, that governments should benefit from taxing land based on its value due to position or the public services which have generated additional value, would seem very fair. The issue is how you do this retrospectively - do you wait until the current ownership changes so everyone knows the new rules? Or do you allow accumulated taxes to be paid on sale of the property so that current owners are not forced to sell? Will there be protection for renters until ownership changes? Does the Association consider land on which the family home is built is 'unproductive' simply because it does not produce goods and services which are valued in cash? Is the Association still arguing for replacement of all other tax? Editor.)



Ex -

Economic Reform Australia

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26. All outdoor advertising material, signs or decorative materials (including flags or bunting) be approved by the Council prior to being erected, in accordance with the Council's Outdoor Advertising Policy.
 27. Display lighting, other than that required for reasonable security, shall not be used between the hours of 9.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. on any day.
 28. Provision be made for fifty-six (56) car parking spaces, in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Car Parking Code, and arranged as shown on the plans with each bay marked on the pavement. Spaces 1 to 4 being removed.
 29. The driveway be altered to a 'type 2' driveway, combined entry/exit.
 30. Where at all possible, noise making equipment including air conditioners, cooling plant and the like be placed on the creek side of the building.

NOTE 1: The Local Government Act provides that all buildings and alterations to be subject to the issue of a building permit from the Council. Issue of this consent in no way implies that the building(s) comply with all of the provisions of the Local Government Act and Ordinance 70. Application forms are available from the Health and Building Department for this purpose.

NOTE 2: The Local Government Act and Public Health Act provide specific conditions relating to the handling and storage of food. Council's Health and Building Department should be consulted to determine any requirements relevant to this consent.

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NOTE 3: The provisions of the Council's Planning Instrument require development consent for most forms of advertising signs and structures to be licenced. The Council has adopted a policy relating to outdoor advertising that sets out standards for various forms of advertising. Information is available from the Council.

14th August, 1990

P. B. Reynders
(P. B. Reynders)
CHIEF PLANNER.

Katrina.

Extract from Reynders report to Council. It is likely that this wording is the same as that used in the DA Determination. The Determination is available for inspection, free at Council and may be photocopied. Pedro says he has a copy.