

# THE MORAL BASIS OF RIGHTS IN LAND

## ■ THE ST PETERSBURG DECLARATION ■

LAND includes all the resources of nature, including urban space, the fertility of rural land, the resources of seas, rivers and oceans, and air space.

Land is the common inheritance of humanity. Every individual has the natural and equal right of access to land. The equal right of every member of society corresponds to equal duties.

This right is universal, and is recognized by the representatives of all philosophies and religions as a birthright. It was observed in a practical way in ancient cultures, when access to land was provided on the basis of the equal right of every member of the tribe.

The peoples of Russia and of the CIS countries have the cultures of both the West and East in them. Today, once again, they have the opportunity to adopt the philosophic and moral basis of property rights to land in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the population. Mutual agreement has to be achieved on the following principal problems:

### PRIMARY RIGHT TO PROPERTY IN LAND

LAND belongs to everybody as a birthright. This was accepted by ancient cultures, whose system of rights was developed to

**MINISTERS of the CIS governments who led their delegations to the ecology conference in St. Petersburg (report: page 14) received a statement on the moral and philosophical basis of rights in land drafted for the conference and signed by:**

**\* Dr. Anatoly Shesterjuk, professor in the Faculty on Legal Environmental Protection, St. Petersburg State University, who is Chairman of the Board of St. Petersburg Lawyers' Association**

**\* Dr. Galina Titova, St. Petersburg Research Centre for Ecological Safety, Russian Academy of Sciences**

**\* Tamara Chystyakova and Tatyana Roskoshnaya, Eco-grad, St. Petersburg**

**\* Fred Harrison, Land Policy Council, London**

provide the opportunity for every individual to use sufficient land for survival. Those rights included:

\* the exclusive right to occupy and use land, which is the right of possession;

\* the right to transfer the use of land while selling buildings and improvements on the land;

\* the right to inherit and transmit by inheritance.

But those rights did not include the freedom to

\* threaten the welfare of society by damaging or destroying

the environment;

\* privatise what is called the Economic Rent of land, which is the revenue received as a result of better natural features and the location of one land site compared with others.

### DUTIES RESULTING FROM RIGHTS TO LAND

ECONOMIC Rent is the annual value of urban and rural land and other natural resources. It is created by the whole of society.

Economic Rent can be precisely measured when individuals are free to compete for the right to use land under conditions of the free market. This approach provides the optimum revenue for both society and the individual.

The right to possess land and use other natural resources should be matched by the duty to pay Economic Rent to society. Development of the mechanism to extract and use rent for public purposes guarantees that everybody has an equal share of natural welfare even if he or she is not a direct possessor of land.

### THE ROUTE TO PROSPERITY THROUGH RENT REFORM

NEGATION of the community's rights to land is the main

obstacle to the realisation of the rights of the individual.

The privatisation of Economic Rent is the main instrument for oppression. It results in serious social and ecological consequences.

Social renewal is possible only when the *right to possess* corresponds to the *duty of the possessor to pay economic rent*. This new system of public finance would enable government to abolish the taxes that prevent the growth of public welfare and the living standard of the population.

### CRISIS OF POLITICS IN RUSSIA

NOTHING can prevent Russia and the other countries of the CIS from becoming prosperous societies. They are rich in natural resources and the population is well educated. The crisis they have is a political one. This stems from the lack of agreement on the moral and philosophical basis of property rights to land.

New laws and decrees contradict each other and do not correspond to the interests of the population. They remove the individual's natural rights and they are the social cause of corruption and criminality. This can be illustrated by western society, which is the social order of the land owners.

In post-Soviet countries there exists a serious threat that science, culture and legislation will serve monopoly power, which the new class of owners and civil servants of the federal agencies are demanding for themselves.

If government acts in accord-

ance with the correct principles of property rights to land, it will be easier to undertake important reforms, including those contributing to the problem of sharing the public revenue between the budgets of the various tiers of government.

In drafting their new constitutions, Russia and the other CIS countries should not rely only on the constitutions and legislation of western countries, for they were written by the representatives of the class of land owners to protect their interests and rights to land.

### THE PRECONDITION FOR SOCIAL RENEWAL

ADOPTION of property rights that correspond to historical tradition and the modern interests of society and the individual (via equal rights to land and private property in capital) permits harmony in the material and spiritual progress of society.

The precondition for the moral renewal of Russian society is the guarantee of natural rights on the basis of Russia's ancient tradition of public debate and social consensus.

This approach to a new world order is the only one based on principle. It is formulated in the documents of the UN conference on the environment held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and approved by the Russian Government as the basis for a strategy for stable and ecologically safe economic development.

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## GEORGIST PLAN FOR A POST-COMMUNIST GEO-NOMICS

THE Georgist theory of public finance offers the most effective strategy for transforming post-Soviet economies while simultaneously addressing the ecological crisis created by communist economics.

The detailed exposition of this thesis is presented by Fred Harrison in his contributions to two books.

The first, written while Mikhail Gorbachev was still the Communist Party boss of the Soviet Union, explains the ethical basis of a land-rent fund that could be established to share the costs of cleaning up the environmental damage inflicted by marxism.<sup>1</sup>

The second study appears in a book devoted to the ecological problem in the European context.<sup>2</sup> Edited by Sara Parkin, one of Europe's leading environmental campaigners, this study explains how the Georgist model could help the USSR to remain as a political unit while devolving power to its constituent units (the republics).

Since 1991, the Soviet empire has broken up. But the environmental problem is so overwhelming that it will take an international effort to solve the problems created, for example, by Chernobyl.

That means the plans elaborated by Harrison remain valid. But to succeed, the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which succeeded the USSR, will have to collaborate by pooling the rent of land and participating in a common strategy.

1. Richard Noyes (editor), *Now the Synthesis: Capitalism, Socialism & the New Social Contract*, published by Shephard-Walwyn (London) and Holmes & Meier (New York), 1991. This volume can be bought from CIT Ltd., 177 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EU, £14.95.

2. Sara Parkin (editor), *Green Light on Europe*, 1991. Published by Heretic Books, PO Box 247, London N17 9QR, England. £9.95, US\$16.95; A\$24.95.

**PAUL KNIGHT**