

COOPERATIVE INDIVIDUALISM: AN ALTERNATIVE TO OTHERS ISMS By Edward J. Dodson, M.L.A. / September, 2020

None of the conventional "isms" address the fundamental imbalance between human and property rights associated with access to and control over nature. In terms of labor and capital goods, nature has a zero cost of production. Nature is provided to humans as a commons for our use and survival.

Almost alone among the great political and economic thinkers, the American Henry George presented a cogent argument for a labor and capital goods basis for private property. Nature is, George argued, the source from which all wealth is produced. Thus, nature is the source of private wealth but is not legitimately to be treated as private wealth. The ideal structure for accessing any part of nature is under a competitive bidding system for a leasehold interest issued by the community or society. Note, therefore, that government acts as the agent of the community and society for administering such a system.

As deeds to nature had already become a widespread norm, Henry George argued that a second-best approach was for government to collect from every "owner" (i.e., deedholder) of land the full potential annual rental value of any location privately held.

Henry George went on to include in his definition of "land" all natural assets with an inelastic supply, such as frequencies on the broadcast spectrum or take-off and landing slots at airports. Laws adopted by communities that restricted competition also result in income that is unearned and is, therefore, appropriately captured as public revenue.

These sources of revenue would serve as the fund with which to pay for democratically agreed upon public goods and services, with the potential for an annual citizen's dividend to be distributed.

The principles embraced by Henry George and developed in his books, addresses and articles have a long history. Many other thoughtful analysts reached similar conclusions. The term that best describes these principles is, I suggest, "cooperative individualism".