

A lesson to be learned

The People's Budget: an Edwardian tragedy by Geoffrey Lee (revised edition) Shephard-Walwyn, 2008, 80pp p/b, ISBN: 978-0-85683-262-8, £7.95

This compact book is a terse historical vignette of a time of great significance for would-be reformers—Lloyd George's People's Budget. The eponymous 'great Edwardian tragedy' is, according to the author, "that the key to solving our economic and social problems was in the hands of these politicians and not used". This revised edition of Lee's book has been published for the celebration of the 2009 centenary of Lloyd George's budget [see p.24].

The People's Budget is usually considered as the starting point of the modern Welfare State. But most reformers will tell you that the most important measure contained in the budget never got through.

The 1909 Group is "a cross-party celebration of the centenary". It has been set up "to foster a re-examination of some of the key issues that were left as 'unfinished business' in the constitutional upheavals wrought by that government's radical liberal economic and social agenda"—which, it believes "have been buried beneath a century of swings between socialist and monetarist policies".

Lee's book provides necessary illumination for that "re-exami-

nation". It records the history of the struggle of the "peers verses the people" which fatefully—though leading to the neutering of the House of Lord's power over money bills—still left 'the Land Question' unanswered—as it remains to this day. The (real) landed classes today may be of a different sort (middle class, urban); yet landed privilege persists, and it is in large part responsible for bringing the world to its present sorry state.

Lee's book is a well written account of the political machinations leading up to and surrounding a key moment for the modern world. The story Lee tells will surely become an increasingly important political and social reference in a post-recession world.

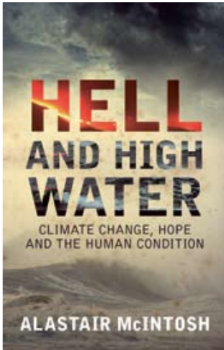
Peter Gibb

Come hell

Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and The Human Condition by Alastair McIntosh Birlinn, 2008, 289pp, p/b ISBN: 978-1-84158-622-9, £8.99

There are few charismatic figures leading today's reform movements. Alastair McIntosh is one of them. He combines vigorous activism with deep learning, all executed with an infectious passion that sweeps us along towards a vision of a decent society, one in which humans may once again live in harmony with nature.

Unlike many other critics of the current order, one based on exploitation, the author acknowledges the possibility that capitalism may not have to be swept away in its totality. But how do you eliminate its cut-throat features? McIntosh explains that conservation of depletable resources, and



curbing the ruthless despoliation of the environment, could be accomplished by using the tools and values to which the current market system claims it adheres.

For example, "shifting the base of taxation away from people's labour and profit and on to energy simultaneously tackles both the energy that we daily consume and that which is 'embodied' in the manufacture of goods and services". Unfortunately, while sections of the green movement vigorously champion the notion of fiscal reform, the profound

implications of this strategy have not penetrated the mindsets of policy-makers.

To change that mindset, however, we need treatments that dig deeper than the formalities of fiscal policies. And that is the value of McIntosh's book. He explores the cultural, psychological and spiritual issues—all interlinked—that make up the human experience. Adjusting one of the pillars that hold up the structure necessarily affects the rest of the social system. We need to know how we are affected, so that the full range of benefits are understood and accepted.

Fred Harrison

Unownable

Against Intellectual Property by Stephan Kinsella Ludvig von Mises Institute, 2008 70pp, p/b, ISBN: 978-1-93355-032-9 \$6

This essay by a legal theorist is an examination of the whole notion of owning ideas. Kinsella's conclusion is that intellectual property infringes on other property rights and is contrary to a free market. Kinsella delivers his analysis convincingly from his libertarian viewpoint—"one should bear a heavy burden of proof to enjoy a monopoly". This small book is a worthwhile contribution to the debate defining the limits of property.

Maxwell Lewis

Planetary real estate

The Earth Belongs to Everyone by Alanna Hartzok Institute for Economic Democracy Press, 2008, 360pp, p/b, ISBN: 978-1-93356-704-4, \$25 / £14.99

This collection of essays and articles by Alanna Hartzok traces her 25 year search for the fundamental truths behind the wealth and poverty displayed on our planet. It was not an easy journey and Hartzok did it the hard way. She worked with the children of migrant workers in Pennsylvania; with impoverished African Americans in Atlanta, and in a coal-mining village in Appalachia; she taught in a Palestinian school in Beirut; she, as she puts it, "meandered the alleyways through the favelas of Santo Domingo" and visited the slums of Nairobi. Lagos she says was a living hell. She endured personal poverty and homelessness in San Francisco.

But all the time she gathered answers, one by one, in her quarter century quest, and they are gathered here in this important book. It touches the social and political movements of our times. As she says: "We live in a time of crisis and chaos, in a world on a precipice." If we are to avoid catastrophe and relentless conflicts then "warfare or earthshare" is the choice Hartzok sees before us.

The book is roughly divided into themes. Perhaps the most

urgent of them comes in the first essay—her EF Schumacher lecture in Massachusetts—"Democracy, Earth Rights and the Next Economy". The essay begins by looking at what went wrong historically. England used to have a rough and ready system that gave farmers a fair share of the land, but the Enclosures took the common land from the people by force. Hartzok quotes a protest rhyme from the period:

*The law hangs the man and flogs the woman
Who steals a goose from off the commons,
But turns the greater scoundrel loose
Who steals the commons from the goose.*

The author also quotes the Bible which teaches that the earth is the Lord's, that we are but strangers resident upon it and that the profit of the earth is for all. She argues that Christianity lost its mission for economic justice when it became the official religion of the Roman Empire and Roman land law was grafted onto it.

Hartzok's book is wide-ranging in its subject matter and focus. But she invariably returns throughout the book to land value taxation as the modern answer to ancient problems. (She examines the example of Pennsylvania where the policy is being put into practice.)

This book must be read for its span and depth to be appreciated.

Geoffrey Lee

a quick note ...

Adam Smith: A Moral Philosopher and His Political Economy by Gavin Kennedy. h/c £60

Dr Kennedy is one of the world's foremost experts on Adam Smith. His website and this, his latest, book debunk modern mis-interpretations of Adam Smith's thinking. The book provides a crucial reminder of how relevant Adam Smith was in his own time, and continues to be in ours.

Growth of the Soil by Knut Hamsun. p/b \$13.00

A beautiful Nobel Prize-winning novel (1917 in a new translation 2007) by an ugly fascist-sympathising man. An epic Norwegian story spinning together mankind's elemental bond with the land and its faulty economic relationship with its blessings—the latter wreaking havoc among individuals, their families and communities.

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism by Naomi Klein. p/b £9.99

Naomi Klein (author of *No Logo*, a classic of the anti-globalisation movement) accuses American profit-makers and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman of engineering an alliance between the corporate world and war-mongering governments to exploit disaster and war and their aftermath.

New Ideas from Dead Economists by Todd G Buchholz. p/b \$30

In this revised edition Buchholz surveys and critiques economic thought from Adam Smith's invisible hand of the 18th century to the depression-fighting ideas of the Keynesians and money-supply concepts of the monetarists of the 20th century, with the briefest visit to Henry George along the way.

The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008 by Paul Krugman. h/c \$24.95

The 2008 Nobel laureate has updated his 1999 book to respond to the economic crisis. Krugman says the failure of regulation to keep pace with an increasingly out-of-control financial system set up the United States—and the world as a whole—for the greatest financial crisis since the 1930s.

A Splendid Exchange by William J Bernstein. h/c \$30

A Splendid Exchange tells the extraordinary story of global commerce from its prehistoric origins to the controversies surrounding it today. It transports readers from the ships that carried silk from China to Rome in the 2nd century, to the modern era of televisions from Taiwan and T-shirts from China.