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TINA: WE HAVE HEARD THAT BEFORE

There Is No Alternative: so declared John Kenneth Galbraith in a lecture to the Institute of Public Policy in the House of Commons on Nov. 24. The leftwing professor of economics was chanting the stricture (though not the same message) of an erstwhile British Prime Minister, the rightwing Margaret Thatcher.

Exposing the poverty of philosophy of the Left, Galbraith endorsed the welfare/corporate state which was, he insisted, a pragmatic system. "We have been the initiators and leaders in the social revolution that has taken the cruel edge off capitalism.

"The lesson is clear: we must learn to live with our own achievement. We are no longer in search of an alternative economic system. Nor is it any longer clear that one exists. We are concerned with making more effective and more tolerant and equitable the economic system we have. Our claim is not to violent change, certainly not to revolution. It is to a socially better performance by the existing system...To those who say this has a slightly antique sound, only one answer is possible: there is no other."

Really?

There is an alternative, but the leaders of world opinion have not heard about it! The alternative philosophy is most neatly associated with the name of American social reformer Henry George. For 50 years, the philosophy has held no sway in politics. For even longer, it has not been treated seriously by academia, its advocates allowing the most pernicious attacks on it to go unanswered.

The rich texture of the Georgist philosophy has not been developed for the benefit of those who are searching for the practical route to a poverty-free society. The alternative economic and social system would unite (rather than divide) people; would facilitate (rather than hamstring) the wealth-creators; would nurture peace (rather than stir conflict) among nations.

The failure of contemporary philosophy was illustrated at last month's Congress of Deputies, where the Speaker of the Russian Parliament declared that their choice was between the "liberal market" (which he associated with the USA) and the Scandinavian model. In truth, there is little of substantive difference between these two "models".

In the end, they are both prey to the system of property rights that allows a small class of landowners to feed off the wealth produced by others. Until that fact is understood, and built into the philosophic equations, the Op-Ed pages of the newspapers will continue to be filled with the nonsense that flowed from the pen of Prof. Galbraith.