

ANTHOLOGY TO SAVOUR

FRED Harrison's chapter in *Green Light On Europe*¹ ties together several of the threads that run through the anthology of 30 contributions by authors from 16 countries.

The strongest thread of all is the belief that "it may not be too long before the Second World joins the Third World in subsidising the First World" (Edward Goldsmith), i.e., through providing under-valued raw materials and cheap repositories for waste. "Yet ... overcoming the West-East divide will intensify yet further the North-South divide" (Freda Meissner-Blau and Paul Blau).

Harrison commences with the communist experiment, which comprised the ultimate failure to value nature — being based on the Labour (-only) theory of Value. Hence, Comecon produced its own Third World by subsidising the military-industrial complex. Environmental problems were "an inextricable part of the decision to end one social system and begin the search for a new approach".

But this search "has exposed the vortex in the philosophical system which underpins the market economy of the West", he continues.

In their theory of property rights, the founding fathers of modern western political philosophy glossed over the distinction between non-producible nature and reproducible labour and artifacts.

By DAVID RICHARDS

They ducked the issue of access to land.

In the manner of economists, they said: "Let us assume", and in this case they assumed that there was always "as good left for his [the non-landowner's] improvement as was already taken up" (Locke).

Amory Lovins begins his chapter, "Markets In Resource Efficiency" with a counterpart to this assumption: "Most economists view the economic process as ... an endless, circular, disembodied flow of exchange value" — floating free of any moorings in the finite earth.

REFERENCES

1. Sarah Parkin (editor), *Heretic Books*, London, £9.95.
2. For an update see Hardin's contribution to R.V. Andelson, *Commons Without Tragedy* (1991), London: Shepheard Walwyn/Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble.

Land which by virtue of community protection or relative inaccessibility has remained common property has not escaped the consequences of the capitalist paradigm. It has been either over-used (Garrett Hardin's classic "Tragedy of the Comons")² or bathed in waste.

Harrison writes: "By failing to exact rents from those who wished to use the common property as a sink for their waste, the cost structure of the industrial revolution was seriously distorted".

This created "a bias in favour of capital-intensive methods, which skewed the system of production against labour" — a point made also in Nick Robins' contribution: "It appears that not only can full environmental pricing drive a wedge between the economy and environmental destruction, ... but also between the economy and unemployment".

During this century, the raw capital of the earth has been subsumed by economists with produced capital in an umbrella category: "capital". Hence, in Lovins' words, "Resources are conventionally valued at only their

costs of extraction ... thefts from the future are not priced".

The distinctive nature of land is forgotten in capitalism as in communism. A century ago Henry George was endeavouring to put the "geo-—" back into "economics" through fiscal policy along the lines of the Physiocrats' *Impôt unique*, and to rescue free trade from its unwarranted "dismal science" associations.

Harrison continues this venture by adjusting the capitalist blueprint now being offered to post-communist countries. He discusses the practicalities of accurately capturing land rent (to be used for funding socially necessary expenditure and regional equalisation payments) in the context of governments which already own the land.

Essentially this involves making a market that barely exists in the West (in perpetual public leaseholds). Lovins' chapter looks at a similar project — making new markets for energy saved.

In Harrison's view, the core problem of the twentieth century was that Karl Marx, who disdained markets and nature, was honoured by the Left, whereas his arch rival for the baton of reform, Henry George, "who sought recognition for land [and markets] as of primary importance to society", was not.

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deal with the long standing problem of "betterment", the recovery of increases in land value released by planning permission.

Previous attempts to achieve this (the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, the 1967 Land Commission and the 1975 Community Land Act) were all unsuccessful and repealed on change of government. Because Site Value Rating would be a buoyant source of revenue, it is most improbable that it would be repealed by another government.

If a site value tax were put in
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courage land hoarding and speculation, and ensure that everyone could enjoy equality of access to economic resources.

This would in itself promote prosperity and create a high-wage economy without the need for more direct forms of intervention such as wage-fixing legislation.

For many years, the taxation of land values was enshrined in Labour Party policy, and if it is serious about tackling low pay and unemployment, it should resurrect this policy forthwith