

Man did not make the earth, and, though he had a natural right to occupy it, he had no right to locate as his property in perpetuity any part of it; neither did the Creator of the earth open a land-office, from whence the first title-deeds should issue. It is the value of the improvement, only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property. Every proprietor, therefore, ... owes to the community ground-rent for the land which he holds.
- Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

PRELIMINARY TO DESCRIPTION OF GRAPH 4

Before getting to the heart of the matter of Graph 4, let us consider fundamental values, basic human needs, and what might be reasonable expectations for the end goals of a fair and functional economic system. For this we will draw upon the vision of a newly emerging political-economic framework called PROUT (Progressive Utilization Theory), some of the Millennium Development Goals as agreed to by all UN Member States, and human rights declarations.

PROUT envisions a world wherein all life forms – plant, animal and human – are evolving in an integrated manner and expressing the full flowering of physical, psychic and spiritual potentialities. According to this philosophy, every human being has three fundamental desires: (1) the desire to physically survive, (2) the desire to expand one's horizons and realize one's maximum potential, and (3) the desire for an inner spiritual peace. The fulfillment of these desires brings happiness. Their frustration brings sorrow.

PROUT includes food, clothing, housing, medical care and education as basic necessities which must be available to all people through full employment and adequate purchasing power.

All UN Member States have pledged to achieve several Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015, among them: (1) reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day; (2) reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger; and (3) achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

The basic framework for these goals was set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948. Article I states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Article 25 that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

The UN Habitat II Action Agenda adopted by all UN member states in 1996 states:

Access to land and legal security of tenure are strategic prerequisites for the provision of adequate shelter for all and for the development of sustainable human settlements affecting both urban and rural areas. It is also one way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Every Government must ...strive to remove all possible obstacles that may hamper equitable access to land and ensure that equal rights of women and men related to land and property are protected under the law. The failure to adopt, at all levels, appropriate rural and urban land policies and land management practices remains a primary cause of inequity and poverty.

This Action Agenda recommends “land value capture” and “land based taxes” as important to solving these social problems.

The International Declaration on Individual and Common Rights to Earth declares that:

The earth is the common heritage of all and that people have natural and equal rights to the land of the planet. By the term “land” is meant all natural resources. This Declaration affirms that individuals do have the right to secure and exclusive occupation of land as long as (1) it is not used in such a manner as to destroy or impair the common heritage; and (2) there is a condition upon private and exclusive right to land and that is payment of the “rent” – the annual value attaching to the land alone apart from any improvements thereon – to the community as a whole.

The document further states that:

To allow this value (rent) to be appropriated by individuals enables land to be used not only for the production of wealth but as an instrument of oppression of human by human leading to severe social consequences which are everywhere evident... Denying the existence of common rights in land creates a condition of society wherein the exercise of individual rights becomes impossible for the great mass of people.

Linking these perspectives the realization dawns that to maximize human happiness and well being we need to put in place policies based on an ethic of equal rights to the earth.

GRAPH 4 – A NEW ROLE FOR GOVERNANCE

[Graph 4](#) indicates the profoundly important role that governance must play if we are to establish economic democracy and “earth rights.” This graph shows the Privilege Fund converted to a Resource Rent Fund utilized for the public good. Workers, with their just economic opportunities restored, can now accumulate capital through their own savings. Economic justice, abundance and peace are thereby restored.

Prior to the intentional corruption of economics and the resulting travesty of the neoclassical distortion, classical economists had begun to catch the wave of this way forward. Michael Hudson, author of Super Imperialism – The Economic Strategy of

American Empire and other works, tells us that the “rent tax” is what classical economics was all about. “Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Alfred Marshall explained the basic logic for taxing windfall gains to land values,” says Hudson. Here are some quotes that Hudson has assembled:

Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* stated that:

(The rent of land) is a species of revenue which the owner, in many cases, enjoys without any care or attention of his own. Though a part of this revenue should be taken from him in order to defray the expenses of the state, no discouragement will thereby be given to any sort of industry. The annual produce of the land and labour of the society, the real wealth and revenue of the great body of the people, might be the same after such a tax as before. Ground-rents, and the ordinary rent of land, are, therefore, perhaps, the species of revenue which can best bear to have a peculiar tax imposed upon them.

The French Physiocrats, advisors to Kings Louis XV and XVI, coined the term *Laissez Faire*. Some also credit them for first use of the term *capitalist*, as they wanted to transform the countryside away from the land monopoly of the aristocracy to peasant entrepreneurial activities. Towards this end, and to avoid what they perceived to be a looming bloody revolution, they urged the King to place a tax on land, the “*impôt unique*.” Their advice was not taken and the French Revolution erupted.

Thomas Paine was in communication with the Physiocrats as is apparent by his statement: “Every landholder owes to the community a ground rent for the land which he holds.”

David Ricardo developed the Law of Rent in 1815-1817. In his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* he explained that “without a knowledge of (the theory of rent), it is impossible to understand the effect of the progress of wealth on profits and wages, or to trace satisfactorily the influence of taxation on different classes of the community.”

Alfred Marshall in *Principles of Economics* (1898) based his price theory on the principle that land rent is:

a surplus in the sense in which the earnings from other agents are not a surplus ... there is this difference between land and other agents of production, that from a social point of view land yields a permanent surplus, while perishable things made by man do not.

Marshall explained that economic growth “tends on the whole to raise the value of land.”

Over a hundred years ago Simon Patten, the first Professor of Economics at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania held that rather than funding military industries and financing wars, tax dollars should finance public infrastructure via progressive

taxation as a key to building an economics of peace. “If a state is military in character and passive in its [economic development] policy,” Patten explained, “it is a consumer of wealth and not a producer.” Properly funded (from rent capture) public infrastructure investment would “promote general prosperity” and build a “pleasure” economy of abundance.

Graph 4 portrays a new role and *raison d’etre* for the state. This new mandate for governance is to establish a world of peace and prosperity for all based upon principles and policies of earth rights democracy. Without earth rights policies in place, governments succumb to the plays of power, profit, privilege and plunder.

Graph 4 indicates this role of governance with the color GREEN - a reminder that human interaction with the earth to secure basic human needs must be within the capacity of the planet’s ability to sustain life for future generations of humans and other forms of life.

Here is a proposed “Earth Rights Amendment” that can be adopted by municipal charters or state and national constitutions:

People have a right to the earth, sustained in a healthy condition. Therefore,

1. Government shall enforce the liability of persons – corporate or real – who damage the carrying capacity of the earth.
2. People have a common heritage right to “rent” – the economic value of land sites and natural resources which can be used to meet human needs.
3. Their agent – government – is obliged to effect this sharing by:
 - a. Collecting resource rent via taxes, leases, use fees, dues, or other means and then
 - b. Disbursing the recovered rent via provision of government services and/or dividends that benefit all members of society equally.

The constitutions of several countries and commonwealth governments claim the land and natural resources on behalf of the people as a whole. Presently, however, natural resource rent largely escapes taxation, going instead to a few individual or corporate resource owners rather than by rights to all citizens. Various methods of land value capture for public benefit have been developed which can be utilized to secure these common ownership rights. Thus there is now a great potential for the emergence of citizen movements to realize and enforce their “rights to rent” by establishing land value capture and taxation systems.

An emerging new perspective on tax reform, based on the “earth rights democracy” framework, holds that capturing rent for public benefit can yield several positive results including:

- Fair distribution of wealth
- Environmental protection
- Wealth production
- Provision of adequate government services

- Peaceful resolution of territorial conflicts.

This public finance approach removes taxes from privately created wealth including:

- Income, especially from wages, payroll
- Capital, especially of durable quality and non-polluting
- Sales, especially for basic necessities
- Homes and other buildings.

The full rent for private use of our common heritage resources should be collected from:

- Surface land sites according to land value
- Public lands for timber, grazing, mining
- Electromagnetic spectrum
- Geo-orbital zones
- Oil and minerals
- Fish in the ocean
- Water resources
- Emissions into air, water, or soil.

There are numerous examples, past and present, of attempts to base tax policy on this prescription, to capture rent and remove taxes on labor and productive capital. Here are a few in several categories:

SURFACE LAND VALUE CAPTURE

In New York City after World War I there was an acute housing shortage with high crime and unrest in slums. Construction of housing had halted during the war and was still stalled. Industry blamed the crisis on shortage of investment capital and excessive labor costs. The state legislature determined that high taxes on buildings were the true impediment and passed legislation enabling the city to exempt taxes for ten years on new buildings used only for dwellings. The land beneath such exempted new buildings continued to be taxed. A building boom commenced. No public expenditures were involved in this program. The literature tells us that the “construction industry revived, the dwelling shortage ended, civic panic subsided, and municipal revenues rose.”

Unfortunately, the exemptions were rescinded instead of being incorporated into permanent housing legislation. There were two reasons for this. First, when the housing crisis ended, the real estate industry (read big land interests) contended that government should stop interfering with the free market. Since the building tax exemption was a market correction, not an interference, this was a self-serving argument by land speculators and those who counted on housing shortages to allow them to charge high rents. The neoliberal economic paradigm, which neglects the importance of land and land rent, supported these interests as opposed to the public good.

In the state of Pennsylvania twenty municipalities, including Harrisburg, the state capital, have gradually shifted their local property tax systems away from taxes on

buildings and instead capture increasing amounts of land rent via taxes based on land values. In all cases studied, building permits increased in those municipalities compared to others of similar size nearby.

Buildings formerly vacated and boarded up were repaired when owners realized it was better to have productive, serviceable properties than to speculate on future rises in land values, especially as they had now to pay taxes on their unused or underused land. With little or no grants or loans, these cities increasingly have been able to fund their needs for roads, fire and police protection and other services including environmental remediation.

In most cases the decision to implement this form of land value capture was made by city officials. In the case of Allentown, the state's third largest city, it was the citizens who pushed for this tax reform by means of a home-rule charter initiative. They voted for a municipal charter that froze or eliminated all other taxes and permitted tax increases on land values only for a period of twelve years. This city now experiences self-sufficient economic revitalization, the logical and expected result of this kind of tax shift. Allentown's new construction and renovation grew by 82% in dollar value in the three years after the system began. This was 54% more than that of Bethlehem, a nearby city of similar size, despite the latter's receipt of a significant amount of federal grant money.

A Virginia Polytechnical Institute/University study of Pennsylvania's land value tax (rent capture) cities found that the combination of lowering taxes on buildings and raising them on land values results in a measurable, significant increase in building values generated. The stronger the shift, the more the built environment improved.

Other significant changes detected in similar studies of this policy indicate that:

- Taxes on the majority of owner-occupied and rental homes are reduced
- Construction and rehabilitation of residential and commercial buildings are stimulated
- The serious escalation of housing prices and housing rent experienced by most United States cities was averted in these Pennsylvania cities because housing stock expanded.
- Central business districts were revitalized because they attracted greater private investment.
- More efficient land use resulted as a city's idle lots and underused buildings were put into productive use; this in turn reduced the pressure for costly and environmentally harmful urban sprawl.

Hong Kong's use of a land lease method of capturing land values has been a significant boost to this Asian city. The government owns all the land. Assessment is basically an annual value system, which to a significant degree, captures land values for the public, with relatively low tax burdens on industry and labor. A large, subsidized public housing sector is made possible partly because the government already owns the land needed for

such dwellings. In addition, the government further subsidizes this housing through grants and loans, at concessionary interest rates, to its housing authority.

ROAD USAGE RENT CAPTURE

Taxation of motor vehicle ownership and usage also involves land values, although this is often unrecognized. To the extent that road usage rights represent rights to use of a land-related resource, taxing that right is completely in line with land value capture policy. In Singapore, where road space is a valuable resource road usage pricing has been implemented since 1975 and has significantly reduced traffic congestion. At the same time, tax rates on income and productive enterprise have been steadily reduced.

To avoid overcrowding and wasting fuel as vehicles idle in traffic jams, London recently introduced land value capture through traffic congestion pricing based on heavy or light use time of day. The number of vehicles in central London has been dramatically reduced, and traffic flows better.

RENT CAPTURE BY OBEYING THE LAW

Substantial increases in the amount of land rent captured for public benefit can be gained simply by complying with assessment laws already in place.

For example, the U.S. city of Southfield, Michigan found to be out of compliance with a state law that all taxable properties were to be appraised at market value. In Southfield buildings were assessed at 70-80% of market value, but land at only 5-10%. When a Southfield citizen ran for mayor urging compliance, the city stopped exaggerating the value of new construction and renovations, and appraised all land according to highest and best use. James Clarkson was elected to four terms as mayor, each time winning on the issue of fair assessments. Taxes on average homeowners were significantly reduced. The tax base, enhanced by capture land rent, rose by 20% a year during that time, affording many benefits to Southfield's citizens.

SPECIAL BENEFIT DISTRICTS

“Special benefit assessment districts” have often utilized land value capture as the mechanism to pay for new or better public works projects. Upon determining a need for infrastructure benefits, such as paved streets, sidewalks, utilities extensions, or other amenities, a governing jurisdiction designates a district embracing all benefiting properties according to the relative land values of the affected properties served by or adjacent to the facility. A land levy is then put in place which pays for the improvements via the capture of the land values which increase due to the benefits received to the sites because of the new infrastructure.

If such land value capture mechanisms are not in place then holders of vacant land or blighted properties often receive an unearned windfall as their properties increase in value at public expense.

Land value capture benefit assessments districts have the following advantages: Citizens find them to be fair, as those receiving benefits bare the costs; others, who do not benefit, are not expected to pay; orderly urban growth is fostered as local government have more control over where infrastructure is to be extended; benefit districts tend to be democratic and efficient in that projects go forward only if affected owners approve; waste is minimized as those who have to pay take pains to confirm that facilities will be worth their cost.

One example of this type of special benefit assessment district was put in place in Ohio which, after catastrophic floods, inaugurated a flood control system paid for by land value capture. Approximately 77,000 parcels along 110 miles of river valley were individually assessed within two years and land value taxes were levied. The total calculated benefits to properties of the flood control system exceeded \$100 million, more than three times the cost of the flood protection project, demonstrating that infrastructure can be self-supporting under a land value capture system

California's Wright Act allowed communities to vote to create irrigation districts which could issue bonds to be repaid by taxing the increase in land value. Once irrigated, land was too valuable for grazing and too costly for hoarding. So cattlemen sold fields to farmers at prices the farmers could afford. In ten years the Central Valley was transformed into over 7,000 independent farms.

Over the next few decades, vast tracts of treeless, semi-arid plains became the "bread basket of America" and one of the most productive areas on earth. It is a prime example of how land value taxation can promote and enhance the viability of both an efficient and equitable agricultural base.

This land value capture system brought prosperity and healthy, thriving communities. The value of town sites also were enhanced due to the higher productivity of the surrounding farms, yielding higher tax proceeds to local jurisdictions. The irrigation districts became multi-purpose, providing electric power, reclamation, and recreation, as well as water. Some five million acres turned green under this tax reform, which one analyst called "an extraordinarily potent engine for the creation of wealth."

Unfortunately, a large private banking institutions disliked the Wright Act because it mandated that the local irrigation districts held the first lien on land for unpaid land value taxes. Banks were relegated to second place as lien holders. One large private bank initiated lawsuits against the enabling legislation and after several tries the Supreme Court dismembered the Wright Act. Now large agribusiness corporations farm the Central Valley using taxpayer subsidized irrigation.

As more people come to understand the importance of and need for earth rights policies, along with grasping the confluence of the land and land speculator interests with the mortgage and banking interests, there should be fewer setbacks like this in the future. As

we keep in mind the two guns above the Rent and Interest sections of the graphs, the task ahead for “we the people” becomes clear.

BANKS, RENT AND INTEREST

Michael Hudson has it right. Explaining the importance of a rent capture approach to public finance in his paper to the government of Latvia he points out that:

The motto of real estate speculators is that “rent is for paying interest.” *Whatever property rent or, monopoly rents are not taxed are available to be pledged as interest to banks.* Buyers borrow the money to obtain real estate or entire companies, including the natural monopolies being privatized. They increase their revenue (and hence, their ability to pay interest on yet larger loans) by raising prices while avoiding taxation by “watered costs” that are tax deductible, headed by interest payments. Bankers and bondholders end up with the economic rent, while owners and managers get capital gains from asset-price inflation.

Hudson has noticed that the more intensely real estate, stock and bond speculation grows, and the more tax subsidies are given to run into debt, then even more money is diverted to speculation and privatization rather than capital formation and employment.

Hudson sees a simple and direct solution to the rent/interest problem:

Under international law sovereign countries have the alternative of simply annulling their debts and taxing their rent-yielding property and capital gains... What is called for is government revenue to build up basic infrastructure. There are two sources of revenue: taxes, and Treasury credit creation... If credit is to be created, certainly the national Treasury can create it as efficiently as private banks.

RENT CAPTURE APPROACH TO SOLVING HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

In *The Root Causes of Humanitarian Emergencies*, Frances Stewart reports that over the twentieth century an estimated 169 million people were killed in large-scale collective violence, including seventeen individual episodes where more than one million people were killed.

After extensive research into the origination of this massive collective violence, Stewart came to the conclusion that “The causes are to be found in the interactions of power-seeking with group identity and inequalities.”

R. Vayrynen in *Weak States and Humanitarian Emergencies: Failure, Predation and Rent-Seeking* (2000) urges conflict resolution workers to acknowledge fundamental

realities regarding politics and economics by which the state generates and sometimes escalates and prolongs violent conflict through state predatory and rent-seeking activities.

Vayrynen's key hypothesis is that:

Humanitarian crises occur in societies in which the state is weak and elites greedy in pursuing their own interests. In the post-colonial neo-patrimonial state, a strong leader stands at the top of the power pyramid and supports a network of cronies in civilian and military bureaucracies.... The net result is state plunder, exploitation and anarchic, anaemic or failed state systems and increased reliance on force, coercion, and the possibility of organised state sponsored violence against opposition forces.

When the coercive power of the state and the exchange power of the market have been subverted by corrupt politicians and bureaucrats it makes the prospects for sustainable peace extremely unlikely. Trying to harness the integrative power of the community in such a situation by working in and through other civil society institutions, (families, religious, educational, health, and others) may be helpful in terms of emergency relief and humanitarian assistance. However, it will not yield sustainable peace in either the medium or long term.... These good initiatives will always be subverted by actions of corrupt governments, and the increasing criminalisation of politics.

Paul Collier, Mats Berdal, David Malone and others argue strongly that many conflicts can be explained in terms of a competition for control of the production and distribution of natural resources, including land. ... "Conflict diamonds" and the often illegal exploitation of other natural resources such as timber and oil in Sierra Leone, Angola, the Congo and Sudan point towards resource wars being a significant feature in future conflict transformation work.

Clearly there is an utmost necessity to redefine the role of governance as capturing rent for the many rather than surrendering its powers to the plunder of the few if we are to build a world of peace and justice. Developing strong institutions for this purpose is the task before us, and there are models and guidelines emerging to this end.

OIL AND OTHER RESOURCE RENT FUNDS

Experiences with Oil Funds: Institutional and Financial Aspects, is an ESMAP report issued June 2006 which analyzed about a dozen oil and other natural resource rent funds currently in place. Fred Foldvary in *Peace through Confederal Democracy and Economic Justice* has applied the concept of establishing resource rent funds for public benefit as a way to address several areas of violent conflict in the world. There is much to be learned regarding the strengths and weaknesses of various pioneering approaches to these emerging institutions.

The Alaska Permanent Fund, established in 1980, is an excellent model of a transparent and accountable institution which captures resource rent to finance a number of public benefits as well as via direct citizen dividend payments. Under this state's constitution, natural resources are legally owned by the people as a whole. The APF captures rent via oil royalty payments, then places these moneys in an investment fund which generates dividends paid annually to all individuals, including children, resident in the state for at least one year. More than \$27,000 per person has been distributed in this way during the past 28 years. Overall, the dividend program has dispersed more than \$10 billion into the Alaskan economy. Alaska is the only state in the United States where the wealth gap has decreased during this period.

New proposals for the establishment of government rent funds are also coming to the fore. One such is the Bayelsa State Oil Fund Commission Bill which would remedy conflicts over oil revenue and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Another indication of the growing interest in capturing rent for public purposes is a measure before the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee that would recoup \$10 billion in lost royalties from oil companies who had been drilling in waters owned by all Americans without paying for those rights under leases awarded in 1998 and 1999.

The United Nations Habitat Agency's newly launched Global Land Tool Network is in an initial phase of development of a program for land value taxation and capture which will be useful for cities and countries who want to implement this approach to poverty eradication and the establishment of fair and sufficient sources of public finance.

CALL FOR A GLOBAL RESOURCE AGENCY

In that many significant sources of actual and potential natural resource rent lies outside of nation state boundaries in the global commons, there is an urgent, rational, ethical and democratic imperative for the creation of some type of Global Resource Agency which would be responsible for (1) monitoring the global commons; (2) determining rules for access to transnational resources; (3) issuing use permits; and (4) collecting and distributing transnational resource rents and revenues.

A Global Resource Agency would have charge of traffic on the seas; over food resources in the ocean; of mineral resources of the ocean floor; over air traffic and use of the electromagnetic spectrum and satellite orbital zones; and all other transnational resources. It would share with local and regional governing authorities jurisdiction over mineral ores, oil and natural gas under land and water.

Other significant global revenue sources are taxes or fees based on the polluter-pay principle such as carbon dioxide emissions, international flights or aviation fuel, international shipping or dumping at sea (if such is to be permitted at all), and air pollution due to industrial activities.

A primary duty of the Global Resource Agency would be to accurately assess and collect these resource rent and user fees and equitably distribute the funds worldwide as calculated by formulas based on population, development criteria and currency purchasing capacity.

Revenues raised from access fees for the use of global commons could fund sustainable development programs, environmental restoration, peacekeeping activities, or low interest loans for poverty eradication. Funds are also needed on the global level to finance justice institutions such as the World Court and the International Criminal Court and to facilitate policy convergence in areas such as trade, currency exchange, and human rights.

Local communities can and should deal with local surface sites such as for farms, residences, businesses, and community benefit or services; regional authorities can best administer regional systems and areas such as watersheds, rivers, ports, forests, grasslands, parks, etc. However, a global authority is needed to regulate, administer, and see to the equitable use of, and profit from the high seas, air, shared water bodies, mineral deposits, etc.

Rather than fight wars over control of transnational resources, the Global Resource Agency would resolve such matters through the use and application of international regulations and law. Such a body could also assume substantial authority for levying fines and penalties for the abuse of common heritage resources. Punitive action would be brought against individual violators of such laws, as well as against government agencies and jurisdictions.

The royalties from the use of such resources would constitute an independent revenue stream adequate to enable the Global Resource Agency to administer its tasks: accurately and fairly assessing the value of transnational resources; collecting resource rents and royalties; patrolling and policing the transnational territory; seeing to the restoration, protection, and sustainable use of such resources; checking violations and maintaining courts before which those accused of violations could be tried; and equitably distributing the funds for worldwide poverty eradication.

Thus the Global Resource Agency would be based upon the pooling of sovereignty over the seas, the air, and the mineral resources of the earth - through recognizing and declaring these to be the common heritage of all the people of the earth. Any person or corporation extracting raw materials from the earth or dumping anything into the global commons would thus be licensed by the Trustees of the Global Resource Agency, and required to pay full resource rents and user fees. The charge would need to be enough to protect the resource, to use it sustainably and in the case of non-renewable resources to build a fund for the gradual replacement by renewable resources. These fees would both support and maintain our systems of global governance and be equitably shared to promote peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development worldwide.

A number of national governments would likely be willing to support the establishment of a Global Resource Agency if it were truly capable of promoting stability and economic human rights for their people. The push for its creation could come from a unity of these countries plus a powerful network of non-governmental organizations. Lead organizations would need to be recruited to promote and develop the plan and to talk with potential governments that might be interested. Places to look for components of a Global Resource Agency include the Law of the Seas Treaty, the Moon Treaty, the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR RENT CAPTURE

The powerful tools of information technology can well serve our work in securing the earth as our birthright. Cities and towns are putting property values and tax information into computer databases and onto the web, where this information is transparent and easily accessible. Geographic information systems (GIS) are computer maps containing detailed data. These new technologies are now being utilized in the development of ways to easily, simply and effectively implement land value capture policies.

“Google Earth” types of information technology will be of great assistance to us in finding answers to these important questions: Who owns the earth? How much do they profit? How much land rent do they pay into the common fund?” LANDSAT satellite technology can help us determine if land, water and air resources are being polluted or destroyed. Those indicators can serve as red flags indicating the need to levy pollution taxes or fines. All of these concerns can be monitored by the masses via computer technology. Safeguarding the planet and capturing rent for the people could become the “best game on earth.”

CONCLUSION

“We are not aliens. We are from the same planet.”

These are the words on a placard carried by two women among the fifteen thousand people marching for peace and human rights in San Francisco, as shown in a photo from the June 2006 edition of *PeaceWork*, a publication of the New England Regional Office of the American Friends Service Committee.

U.S. Congressman Dennis Kucinich, a current candidate for President, spoke elegantly as to the ultimate truth of where we come from in his *Spirit and Stardust* speech given at the Praxis Peace Institute Conference held at Dubrovnik Croatia on June 9, 2002:

We need to remember where we came from: to know that we are one. To understand that we are of an undivided whole: race, color, nationality, creed, gender are beams of light, refracted through one great prism.

As we aspire to universal brotherhood and sisterhood, we harken to the cry from the heart of the world and respond affirmatively to address through thought, word and deed conditions which give rise to conflict: Economic exploitation, empire building, political oppression, religious intolerance, poverty, disease, famine, homelessness, struggles over control of water, land, minerals, and oil.

This series of graphs has traced inequalities and root causes of wars to the most fundamental flaw in the “person/planet” relationship – the private appropriation of most of the riches of the earth by a few individuals, corporations and banks. Graph 4 has shown us a way forward with several examples of capturing rent for the benefit of the people of the world from the local to the global level.

The very first image in each of the graphs portrays a group of humans as representing humanity as a whole. The identity of each and every one of us as full-fledged and equal members of the human race is the sine qua non – the essential identity – from which to claim our fair share rights to planet Earth.

Exclusive territorial rights to land and natural resources can no longer be based primarily on discovery or prior claim, on conquest or military force, or by financial or legal mechanisms.

The only rational, supportable, moral, just and ethical basis upon which to assert a private claim to the resources of the earth is by birthright to the gifts of nature. The claim by birthright can only be legitimate if it is acknowledged that all other human beings have an equal claim to the gifts of nature. The deepest ethical dimension of territorial rights recognizes that humanity is one and indivisible in its fundamental right to the planet.

We now have many keys in the form of earth rights policies that our governments can use to unlock the riches of the commons in order to meet the basic needs of all those now living while at the same time these common resources can be held in trust for future generations. We are ready to establish earth rights democracy.

If we are to move from warfare to earthshare we must grasp the profound interconnectedness of all life on our small and wondrous world. How we hold the earth is how we hold each other. The rules and laws of governance, of how we choose to live together on the planet, need to reflect this most fundamental truth – The Earth Belongs to Everyone.

