

## ***Sharing our common heritage via the tax shift agenda***

*by Alanna Hartzok, Scotland, PA*

(Editor's note: Alanna Hartzok is one of two (Pat Aller serves as alternate) United Nations Non-Governmental Organization representatives for the International Union for Land Value Taxation. She dedicated her speech at the August 1, 1998 banquet at the

Council of Georgist Organizations conference in Portland to the memory of the late Betsy Dana, a former Portland resident. Betsy Dana started the Georgist Registry and also the Registry for the World Federalists, with whom she was also active.)

Our theme is sharing the common  
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heritage via the tax shift agenda. And basically I am just going to do some sketches of what we are up against in terms of globalization, and the massive privatization of land and resources of the planet, and the kind of havoc that is causing. But also in the crisis of that we have the opportunity to really affirm the whole context, which I see as important to the Geogrist movement, of common heritage resources.

There are several movements in that direction that I think are going to really help us in our linkage with a full scale tax shift agenda. And after covering those common heritage activities I want to look at how the tax shift agenda could be a really strong component in a mass local to global movement building.

*Corporate Planet*, subtitled *Ecology and Politics in the Age of Globalization*, is a quite impressive work that has just been put out by the Sierra Club. It looks at how the current form of development world-wide, through the World Bank, is using massive amounts of ground rent, privatized through oil resources, to fund development policies that exclude people from the heritage of the land and resource base. For instance, one is a World Bank funded project for corporations (this always seems to get directed to corporations, not to the people themselves) to build a dam in Japan which displaced 30,000 rice farmers.

Another one was building roads for hacienda owners in Central America for cotton export, which displaced massive amounts of peasants. They are pushed into the rain forest, and they chop down the rain forest, and then that land is used for export for beef products. And again they are left basically homeless. Logging projects in Africa displaced 200,000 people who were dependent on forests for their livelihood.

This form of development policy has been pervasive. We can look back to 1948 in North Dakota. At that time there was probably the only Indian Tribe who were sustainably farming along the Missouri River bottom. The Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation decided to put a number of dams on the Missouri River. One they placed right outside of the reservation. Reservations are not national parks for native peoples; they are sovereign territory arranged by

treaty. The dam was built, and the dam flooded that whole river bottom and displaced those 1500 native Americans who then went into poverty and welfare conditions.

The sequel to this 1948 story was in 1991. One of the children born in a tarpaper shack to the displaced Indians, after the flooding of their ancestral territory, went from poverty to graduating from Stanford to law school at Yale. His name is Raymond Cross and in 1991 he found himself leading the case for a settlement for the people who were displaced in 1948. In 1991 he won the case and a \$149.5 million settlement for their lands.

Maurice Strong is a board member of corporations that hold massive amounts of land holdings in New Mexico. He was in charge of major development and privatization of hydro-power and other natural resources in Canada and went on to become a major mover and shaker for the past twenty years within the United Nations system. He was chair of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. His vested interest in land is quite pervasive. His companies displaced indigeneous peoples in Central America to create lands for tourist development.

One of Strong's most recent acquisitions was that of a major North American aquifer in Colorado, and his intention then was to sell water resources to Denver. The local communities who formerly were in charge of that aquifer had to raise taxes in order to raise legal funds to fight this corporate grab of their water which previously was a common heritage resource used for those communities.

So is it any wonder that in the "Rio Plus Five" 1997 conference at the U.N. the results came in that there has been really no progress in sustainable development efforts in the past five years. We have gone backwards. We have an opportunity here to look very clearly at land tenure, taxation and overall financing for development policy, local to global, to set us on a new track.

I want to tell you about the Seed Satyagraha movement in India. Imagine that you were growing heirloom tomatoes in the backyard of your homestead, that the seeds had been passed on for generations, and those seeds were really well matched to the conditions in your particular land. Imagine then that somebody from a thousand

miles away came and took the tomato and took that seed and analyzed the genetic DNA patterns of the seed, and then claimed it as the property rights for a particular corporation. And they said that you were no longer allowed to grow your tomatoes. And they then tried to sell you other seeds that would not reproduce and you would no longer have seeds, generation after generation, to keep growing with.

That is essentially what has been happening throughout the Third World with the privatization of intellectual property rights to the genetic code of life itself. While this was happening there were also massive public relations campaigns throughout India by the Cargill Corporation to show the farmers how advantageous it was to buy their seeds, that they could have greater crops with the new seeds, though of course it came with a certain chemical and pesticide base. Because of the glitz of the public relations, of the video tapes and the glossy literature, many of the Indian farmers went along with this and started buying these seeds from Cargill, and started neglecting their traditional seeds that they had used for eons of time.

But when the farmers realized after a very short period of time that these seeds could not produce any more seeds, and they would forever have to buy more seeds, they began to organize and rise in protest. The ten million plus united farmers in India went to the head office and the production center for Cargill Seeds with their crowbars and brick by brick took apart the building. (That form of protest idea started with comments from Carla Hills, who was our Trade Representative to the South, saying that our corporations would pry open the Southern Hemisphere markets with crowbars.)

There seems to be no end to the efforts to privatize common heritage resources and to find ways to control genetic structure. For instance, the "Terminator" technology can splice a gene into any particular seed so that seed cannot reproduce. You have to keep buying and buying the seed. This is just one more example of the global reach of the vested interest of the very few. At this point the statistic is that 348 multi-billionaires have now accumulated more wealth than 2.5 billion people. It is hard to grasp.

We are hopefully nearing the end of

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this monopoly game. And this is what it looks like when you play monopoly. You see all the pieces get into the hands of one person. We are in the greedy grasp of the few right now, and it is just further igniting the people's movements local to global all over the planet to get very clear about the peoples' agenda that is going to create a massive shift in terms of ownership and control of the earth's resources.

I see this shift coming from a number of places. The Indian farmers now have a movement to establish collective intellectual property rights, to affirm property rights that have been vested in the community for eons of time and the experience that the community has had in developing their own sustainably based technology and seed resources. There is the Biodiversity Convention which affirms the human right to the rich variety of genetic resources of the planet that our United States government has been vetoing for many years. Indian scientist Vandana Shiva is a strong voice for the Biodiversity Convention, portions of that are being adopted as legal guidelines, despite the lack of full ratification.

Then we have The Seventh Generation Act. That is a full cost accounting bill being introduced by a Canadian Member of Parliament from Ontario, Joe Jordan. In this we are seeing some common heritage perspectives working their way into legal formatting. We have the call by Ward Morehouse for a widespread debate on the theme of democracy and property rights, which I think is going to get us into the issue of what are the democratic rights to land; we need to base democracy on the right to the earth itself.

I think the best manifesto for common heritage, combining the private individual and the common rights to earth, was put out by the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade in 1948. It is printed on the inside of the back cover of my little booklet, "Financing Planet Management," which is available from Schalkenbach Foundation. This is the 50th year of that wonderfully profound and extremely relevant International Declaration on Individual and Common Rights to Earth. We should really be using it and getting it broadly published and distributed. It is just as relevant now as it was in 1948, and is

a strong backbone for a lot of the work that our movement is doing.

This year is also the 50th year of the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so we could also use this year to affirm human rights to the earth. You might want to set aside December 10, which is the exact date for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and have some sort of event on that day where we can say that the next step in universal human rights is declaring the right to the planet itself.

I am grateful that Hanno Beck urged me to attend the Tax Shift conference in Washington, D.C. this past April. To me, it was the most optimistic sign of the potential for our movement developing a massive strength that I have seen at any time probably in the last several years. The tax shifters conference was two days long, sponsored by Redefining Progress and the Center for a Sustainable Economy.

The context is developing where environmentalists have come to understand that to have the strong support of the middle classes, they have to have a concern about wages, and to have a base in low income communities there also must be a concern for environmental justice, and a way of building support by business as well. So they saw a way to build a broad range of support by shifting from a bureaucratic command control approach to environmental restoration to a market approach through tax incentives.

This is a really major shift for environmentalists to be making, and it moves them from being a net drain on government resources to increasing the tax base for government. Because there is a strong movement to decrease rather than increase the size of government, environmentalists then realized that they had to have a revenue neutral tax shift, and so they combined the objectives of economic justice with that of supporting legitimate business enterprise by advocating reductions in income, payroll and business taxes. This is certainly a Georgist concept, and though there was not a strong speaker for land value or site value taxation at the Tax Shift conference, Alan Durning's book was given to all conference participants.

Andrew Hoerner of the Center for a Sustainable Economy (CSE) has done an exhaustive survey of over 400 ecotax policies already in place throughout

the fifty states. Now they are gleaming the best practices from those 400 policies. CSE has sent to me the work they have done for Pennsylvania, asking me to review that. They are very interested in Pennsylvania's work with the land value tax because some are coming to see that the land value tax is a very important tax shift policy that they need to get well versed in and up to speed on.

CSE is considering focusing on and targeting Pennsylvania for some of their tax shift efforts because of our two-rate land value tax efforts in the 16 cities there. So I think organizing-wise, all of you should get hold of the ecotax research and find out what ecotaxes are already in place in your state, and network with these policy institutes that are talking about the tax shift. There were about 70 people at Tax Shift and they represented about 50 different organizations. Worldwatch and many other major DC think tanks had sent representatives.

Another field that is related that I only recently found out about is the financing for development dialogue. The background to this is that the G-77 (the Group of 77 developing countries, as juxtaposed to the developed countries, G-8 — the 8th being Russia) has called for a wide dialogue within the UN system and within the UN members on the theme of "Financing for Development" which they perceive is a real weak point coming out of Agenda 21 from the Rio Earth Summit. They are realizing that there are lots of holes in current development theory and that the development approach of the World Bank and the Bretton Woods institutions is not working to irradicate poverty but is in fact exacerbating the problem.

The invitation has gone out on many levels to join in and link with this dialogue on the best practices for innovative funding sources, and how can we mobilize domestic resources for development. The United States is coming strongly in on this. I first heard about it at a briefing at the UN Mission in New York by David Hale, who is President of U.S. AID. We have also our Treasury Department and other agencies of the U.S. government who are invited. There will be input that you can read on their web site, and they will have meetings on the theme of financing for development for the next

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two years.

Another place for us to plug in on that dialogue is the United Citizens Network for Sustainable Development, which is probably one of the strongest networks connecting the Non-Governmental Organizations movement of the UN down to the grassroots level in terms of implementing Agenda 21.

The Millennium Peoples Assembly Network (MPAN) is yet another opportunity, and I think a very great one, for our movement to really grow exponentially. This effort is very visionary yet it has mass mobilization potential.

Last fall UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, in looking ahead to the year 2000, announced that the UN is planning for the General Assembly to have its Millennium Assembly and also a Millennium Summit of heads of state. At that time Annan also put forth the call for Millennium Peoples Assemblies worldwide, local to global, regional, national, and continental. This call for Millennium People's Assembly, also being called a Millennium NGO Forum, has mobilized a move-

ment that has been building for 20 years to establish a permanent Global People's Assembly.

During this decade there have been several UN sponsored global conferences such as the Cairo Summit on Population, the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development (where our NGO first began to participate), the Istanbul Habitat II Summit, and others. At these global conferences, the nation states have their meetings and they develop their agendas by consensus, word by word, phrase by phrase. At the Istanbul one, which I participated in, 183 nation states hammered out by consensus an impressive 165 page document.

Most inspiring to us, and I had talked about this at previous conferences, is the Land Access section of the Habitat II agenda, which calls for land value recapture, and is a pretty thorough going 18-point Georgist policy approach that we need to really keep working with, and get that pushed for implementation.

Also, at these global conferences, the people all come together and they form their own people's agendas. There

were 35,000 people at Rio, 50,000 at the Beijing Women's conference and at Istanbul about 18,000 were assembled. Now we are going to take all these agendas, get them very clear, and then work to build a massive local to global peoples movement to break through the monopoly control of the corporations that are bent on ruling the planet. (To get an excellent perspective on this take a look through David Korten's book, *When Corporations Rule the World*.)

I see the Georgist agenda is already coming to the forefront in the agenda that is being developed. I invite you to become a part of the leadership of this movement for worldwide local to global peoples assemblies so that we will be able to build an agenda process that is going to produce a true global people's document and blueprint for the future. So please consider joining with us in New York for the Millennium NGO Forum and Peoples Assembly in the year 2000.

I hope I have given you some ideas about ways to keep our movement on the move.