

An Extended Free Association Rap Loosely Inspired by Frank Chodorov

Kevin Carson

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Ken Gregg has a nice post in honor of the late anarcho-cap-Georgist Frank Chodorov's birthday at Liberty and Power.

An account of just how much of an influence Georgism has had on libertarianism, of both the Left and Right, would occupy a huge tome. Ken MacLeod made a brief survey of the current range of Georgian (or Geolibertarian) thought in a post a few weeks ago.

The career of Chodorov himself, taken alone, tells us a great deal about the importance of Georgism on the libertarian right. Chodorov was a disciple of Georgist Albert Nock, who devoted major parts of *Our Enemy, the State* to the role of the land monopoly (famously arguing that economic exploitation was impossible without prior expropriation of the producing classes from the land). And Chodorov, in turn, was a mentor of Murray Rothbard (who definitely repudiated Chodorov's Georgist views on land). As for Nock, his effect, not only on the libertarian movement but on the conservative movement of the twentieth century, is incalculable. Although it's doubtful he would endorse their full agendas, an array of conservative thinkers ranging from Russell Kirk to William F. Buckley have claimed him as a major influence.

On the contemporary libertarian right, the Georgist contingent includes Fred Foldvary, Harold Kyriazi, and Debbie Clark.

Georgism also gave rise to a number of hippy-dippy movements (and I mean that in a *nice* way) of the decentralist left, like Ralph Borsodi's School of Living. The Thomas Paine Network, which includes the Tom Paine Caucus of the Libertarian Party, probably falls within this category. Their site has some good material by Mike O'Mara and Paul Gagnon that's definitely worth checking out. And Chris Toto probably belongs somewhere in this grouping; I can't find a website for him, but he's the author of this astute remark:

In the rare cases where the Producers own their own "natural means of production," ...the classically defined systems of Capitalism and Socialism are one and the same, [and] they intersect at a nexus of unusual and infrequent, but eminently possible conditions... Geoism is the nexus of classically defined Capitalism and Socialism; it is the very unusual subset of possible economic conditions where Capitalism and Socialism are the same. It is the market which is truly free of government enforced

entitlements, where each and every individual in a community has the equal right and opportunity to access, use and hold an equal percapita value of the natural means of production for independent self support and self shelter. Geoism is the nexus subset of Capitalism where each and every individual has not only the right *to be*, but the right to be *somewhere*, meaning the equal right to independently use the naturally available wealth in a territory to shelter himself and to produce his own livelihood. This same Geoism is the nexus subset condition of Socialism where government does not top-down command and control markets, but is very careful to avoid granting politically enforced entitlements. Such restraining vigilance results in “maintaining” a level playing field where the market is not forcibly tilted in anyone’s favor. Such Socialism results in a market where no one has a government enforced entitlement to more than percapita shares of natural means of production. Such market “maintenance” results in a condition where all producers have equal rights to use and access naturally available market values (natural means of production) while enjoying the voluntarist freedom of choice in a genuine, unrigged “laissez faire” market. Geoism provides both the advantages of Capitalism and Socialism without either’s possible negative conditions.

Further toward the left end of the Geolibertarian spectrum, we find people like Michael Hudson and groups like the Geonomics Society arguing for the collection of rent not only on land and natural resources, but on “social commons” like the radio spectrum. Many of the same groups advocate distributing, as a “citizen’s dividend,” the surplus rent that remains after all public goods are fully funded.

Back at left-center, the Democratic Freedom Caucus, a libertarian affinity group within the Democratic Party, is made up predominantly of Geolibertarians of one kind or another.

Some Geoists have the disconcerting habit of jumping over commonly accepted boundaries between left and right. Dan Sullivan, for instance, aims at a Geolib fusion of libertarian and green politics. Todd Altman, despite a long history of involvement in the Libertarian Party, is now active in the DFC after becoming disillusioned with the LP’s crypto-Republican economic policies. The tendency of the same names to keep popping up in Geolib groups conventionally classified as left, right, and center, should tell us something about the complexity and variety of Georgist thought and the limited usefulness of political labels.

Even trying to fit most of these various strands of Geoism into hard and fast left-right categories is an exercise in futility. One of the charms of Georgism is that it defies any easy classification on the conventional political spectrum. The movement was originally an outgrowth of the radical/populist wing of the classical liberal movement, and shared the rest of that movement’s emphasis on the radical aspects of Locke (his labor theory of appropriation and the so-called “Lockean proviso”). Even the right-wing fringe of the Geoist movement has a decidedly non-vulgar libertarian tone to it; those sharing in the mainstream Georgist legacy are more populist still.

I’ve no doubt left out a lot of important Geolibertarian thinkers of all persuasions whose ideas deserve consideration; for this I apologize. But in a way, that’s the point of all this. The modern heirs of Henry George are so numerous and diverse that it’s hard even to keep track of them. There are probably at least as many subgroups in the Georgist as in the Trotskyite milieu—but without the mutual animosity and paranoid competition (No, that’s the Judean People’s Front—

we're the Popular Front of Judea!) that characterize the latter. That's pretty damn good for (as Ken MacLeod said) a quaint, bearded Victorian.

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