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SCIENCE

Rob Hershman
CBS Reports/CBS News
555 W. 57th Street
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September 13, 1982

The Earth is the Birthright of all People

Dear Rob Hershman:

Thank you for your interest in the "land question" in America as it gave me an excellent opportunity to do some in depth research which I have found quite valuable.

This letter describes briefly the work of four grassroots organizations struggling with the problems of increasing concentration of land ownership in their regions, shows their historical antecedent in the political economic analysis of Henry George, and mentions some of the people, publications, and news items that are helping to make the connection between our land and taxation policies.

The names, addresses, and phone numbers of key contact persons are listed on page 3. The numbers throughout the letter refer to the contents of this packet, which are itemized on page 4.

The grassroots groups and organizations that are struggling with the land monopoly problem originated from similar concerns about poverty in the midst of plenty. The Appalachian Alliance (#1) sprang from a study group which had asked the question "Why is the land so rich and our people and schools so poor?"

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference project stemmed from the concern of small farmers in South Dakota who urged the bishops in the region to address the problem of concentration of land ownership from a moral perspective. Similar to the findings of the Appalachian Alliance, the resulting analysis ("Strangers and Guests: Towards Community in the Heartlands" #2) urges a restructuring of the tax system.

The Rural America Center in Jackson, Mississippi works in support of small farms for the blacks in that region. They are constantly brought up against economic forces that are concentrating land ownership in the southern states.

The California Institute for Rural Studies in Davis has done an excellent report (#3) on the consolidation of land ownership in that area, showing the extent to which agricultural lands are used as tax shelters. Meanwhile, independent farmers barely make a subsistence living.

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The awakening consciousness of the land monopoly problem in response to the impoverishment of increasing numbers of Americans throughout the country was anticipated by the work and writings of Henry George, the 19th century philosopher and political economist. His major book, Progress and Poverty, explored this theme, as does The Crime of Poverty (#4) and The Land for the People (#5).

The multi-media production "American Pictures" portrays the continuing plight of the poor in this country and is the stunning documentary of a Danish man's (Jacob Holdt) journey through America's social underworld. #6 "And the Poor Get Poorer" (#7) was the main feature of a recent issue of Newsweek.

The fact that poverty and even starvation in America is linked to the land monopoly problem is considered by some to be the "undiscovered revolution in American politics." Yet awareness is surfacing as is clearly shown by an article in the January, 1979 issue of Harpers entitled "Land Rush - A Survey of America's Land". This fine piece estimates that less than 3% of the population now owns 95% of the private land (#8 p. 49)

It may be that the upcoming sale of 5% of our federal lands (#9, Time, Aug. 23, "Land Sale of the Century") will focus the public's awareness on equity considerations in terms of access to these lands. Yet questions of justice in land ownership have been a perennial concern, dating as far back as the biblical Moses and threading their way through the work and writings of American patriarchs such as Thomas Paine, Jefferson, and Lincoln (#10).

The land question is once again becoming a serious matter for discussion and debate. The theme is being given careful consideration by clergyman such as Walter Brueggeman (#11), world order advocate Patricia Mische (#12), Scottish environmentalist Shirley-Ann Hardy (#14), and politicians such as Edward M. Kennedy (#15).

It is to be expected that along with the increasing awareness of land monopoly in America comes a resurgent recognition of the value of Henry George's work and his proposal of land reform through tax reform. The print media is bringing the connection to our attention (New York Times, #16, Washington Post #17), and Bay Area columnists Charles McCalbe and Guy Wright (San Francisco Chronicle (#18) and Examiner) often remind the public of the relevance of George's insights to today's world.

While the land monopoly game is beginning to be discovered by those in rural America, the even greater distortion in economic relationships caused by the privatization of land values in urban areas is almost completely unrecognized. For further discussion of this I recommend that you consult with Mr. Philip Finkelstein, Director of the Henry George School in New York, who served as deputy mayor for financial affairs during the Lindsey administration. Mr. Finkelstein would be able to put you in touch with those in political office on the local, state, and national levels who are working for land reform through land value tax reform.

Please keep me informed as to the next step.

Kind Regards,
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