

OF LAND OWNERSHIP AND JUSTICE

On this EARTH DAY '82 celebration at the Henry George School, I thank Mark Sullivan who chairs this committee for inviting me to participate in the program.

Before I start this brief address, for the sake of clarity, I shall define LAND , because I am not certain that everyone in this audience, except Georgists, will understand that what I mean by LAND is the WHOLE material Universe except man himself (meaning mankind) and what he produces. The material universe to include what is underground (oil, coal, silver etc.), what is above ground (air waves & space...), and of course the sea. Don't think that I am by-passing location and site value itself.

After a definition of LAND it may come to mind that a definition of JUSTICE is in order; not really. Those who believe in the relativity of all things will think that it is a relative term and that justice is on the side of the winner. By the end of this day many may come closer to a clearer definition.

(witnessing)
We are, for the second time perhaps in the history of this New World since Columbus, Ericksen and their boat people, a challenge to LAND OWNERSHIP and Justice. The first great challenge, being the European escape to Freedom. What is perceived to have been religious freedom seekers, were indeed seeking economic freedom. The challenge to the right of Natives to exclusive use of this vast and beautiful continent. A Land that has been religiously cared for to preserve the beauty of its rivers, its plains, its rocks, its valleys and its splendid mountains. Those Natives, how determined were they to keep others out? Our historians tell us that some of them were kind (some of those were to greet newcomers with open arms) others were quite belligerent. Had those newcomers been able to enjoy and share, not destroy or displace those who were here before they came; were they able to use the land without owning it, would the conditions that prevail today in the Americas be somewhat different?

It is indeed ironic that those whose forebears came to these shores of a New World, who, most likely acted as if they truly believed that nature's bounty justly belongs to all, could be responsible for a continent in turmoil? It is equally ironic that those who did benefit by such privilege (no private ownership of land) should see fit to exclude others? How committed to Georgist principle could those natives have been is questionable! they nevertheless had no concept of individual OWNERSHIP of LAND. I am afraid this seem to be changing , even among some Indian nations.

Now the second great challenge "WHO SHALL OWN the land of Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Salvador, Mexico..... and for that matter of U.S.A.? What is really at stake? Is it a revolutionary goal to take the LAND from the rich and give it to the poor? How revolutionary, in the better sense of the word, is it? a system where the LAND of a nation is distributed by special decree, favors, privileges in exchange for support and political alliance?

We have seen that type of change take place so many times when a new republic was formed in the Americas. How much change in the condition of life of those who were not lucky enough to have received their special favor?

Now is the time for Georgists to act in response. This is the time for the GEORGIST MESSAGE to be heard. The message should be heard LOUD and CLEAR " LAND MONOPOLY does hurt the individual and poses ipso facto a threat to the welfare of a nation. It is indeed a function of government to see to it that adequate use of land is the only guarantee to freedom and a secure future for human happiness. A better system of LVT use that would eliminate a constant need for protection that should not be the civilized man's full time obsession.

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The Georgist principle is of universal nature; it is applicable anywhere. It is simple " WHOEVER USES THE LAND AND BENEFITS FROM ITS USE or its misuse for that matter SHOULD COMPENSATE THE COMMUNITY FROM WHICH THE VALUE OF THAT LAND DERIVES. The collected economic rent belongs justly to the entire collectivity, the title owner included.

In concluding, I must say that in taking a careful look at the global community, there are not too many open frontiers.

If we are to succeed in building that better tomorrow, we are to act carefully, and diligently. To bring about the kind of understanding among those that we touch in our daily venture with regards to PRIVATE OWNERSHIP of LAND, we must underline how it affects freedom. It affects those who have monopolized the Land and it affects those who have no land at all to use.

On that note I urge you to incorporate some Georgist thinking in your writing, your poetry, your music, your business ventures and above all your teaching; be it to kindergarden child or a Ph D candidate.

The concept that the LAND of the Planet is NOT the exclusive property of anyone; if it is that way now , that is because we do need to grow in adjusting to the needs of a changing society.

The real threat to freedom and justice is land monopoly.

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