

AMERICA'S FIGHTING BISHOPS REDISTRIBUTE THE NATION'S WEALTH.

LAND AND HUNGER IN AMERICA

The Bishops have presented a clear picture of the present system's shortcomings. But there is a failure to recognize land monopoly as a major factor in hunger in America and in the world.

Once again we have an analysis -- albeit a sensitive and important one-of the struggle between labor and business. What is needed is a hard look at the role landowners play in the economic picture.

The Bishops are quite understandably concerned with the unemployed the working class in our society. But without lifting the huge burden of land monopoly, little can be done in our free economy to alleviate their suffering.

In the United States three percent of the population owns 95 per cent of all privately held land.

If we accept that the earth is a gift and a trust from God, that we are but 'tenants' and 'sojourners' we must realize that the right to exploit the earth and profit from this exploitation carries certain responsibilities...

In Appalachia and in the Heartland the Bishops of America have already taken note of the tremendous role of land in our economy. But in this important pastoral letter, they address the distribution of wealth rather than the inability of the poor to produce because they have no access to the land and its resources.

a brief response to the Pastoral Letter on the American Economy by E. Robert Scrofani, Director of the Henry George School of Northern California at the " First Draft, First Thoughts" Conference,

His Holiness on a number of occasions, including his recent trip to Latin America has made clear this connection between landlessness and poverty. It is worthwhile to note the fervor of some of his remarks:

"It is not just because it is not according to God's design to use this gift in the way that its benefits favor only a few people, leaving the others, the great majority excluded. More serious is the disorder and more insulting the injustice... Land is a gift of God which he gives to all human beings."

In his excellent monograph, "The Dispossessed of the Earth" Eric Eckholm of the World Watch Institute makes the case also very plainly.

- "Throughout history patterns of landownership have shaped patterns of human relations in nearly all societies. They have also helped determine the possibility and pace of economic change.
- "Whatever land tenure patterns prevails in a given area, it is the landless and the near landless who are at the bottom. Hundreds of families are struggling to improve their lives but they lack secure access to the basic of all agricultural life land."

And in his final key paragraph Eckholm concludes:

"Many of the international community's widely shared goals - the elimination of hunger, the provision of jobs for all, the slowing of runawa rural-urban migration, the protection of productive soils and ecologically vital forests are not likely to be achieved without radical changes in the ownership and control of land."

The paradox that HENRY GEORGE saw when he wrote PROGRESS AND POVERTY in San Francisco in 1879 is still with us. As George says, "the tramp comes with the locomotive and the almshouses and prisons are surely the marks of "material progress' as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses and magnificent churches."

After America declared war on poverty in 1960's the Church reminds us again that the issue of progress and poverty remains and the number of poor grows again in the world's most prosperous society.

The Bishops need to focus on the land issue in the production and distribtion of wealth. They cannot relegate the land question to the unfinished section on agriculture. We are all land animals. Finally they need to examine more fully George's peaceful solution for equitable distribution of wealth by tapping the enormous value of land which is now appropriated by the landholders of every society. Until this is attempted the distributive proposals of the Bishops will just assure that our current economic production will be more fairly shared among Americans but would not have the greater economic opportunity for economic justice which is to be gained by giving equal access to the land directly or the use of the land value tax to tap the unearned increment for the good of all society.

JUSTICE THE OBJECT, TAXATION THE MEANS.

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