

A LICENSE TO STEAL!

The odds are 100 to 1 that your pocket, like mine, is being picked by perfectly respectable people who bought from previous owners the legal right to steal, to rob us of our birthright. They are the owners of millions of acres of mineral, farm and timber land - used, underused and unused - scandalously underassessed; of diamond-studded sites in the centers of cities.

Land ownership in the United States is as enormously maldistributed as it is in Central America. Many gigantic land-holding corporations would make as much net profit if they leased their land to others and merely collected the rents.

If you believe that we all have an equal right to life and liberty, then you will believe that we must all share in Nature's bounties. The license to steal began when ambitious and powerful men took the best land of others by force and fraud. Had they paid to the community the extra benefits of superior land, every one's share would have been preserved, for there would have been no need for taxation, which is always arbitrary, immoral and unjust.

Land differs from man-made products. The essential distinction is obscured when the word property is used to include the two. This is the crime of the lawmakers and is generally unperceived by the rest of us. The sacredness of private property applies only to man-made things.

To those who question the postulate that land should belong, in effect, to all equally, the proof should lie in the results that would follow. Its selling price would be practically zero plus the cost of improvements. Land would be available at reasonable, not speculative, rents. There would be no shortage. There would be no bars to production and employment. There would be more jobs than jobseekers. The dream of the Soviets has become a nightmare because in addition to the land, they have taken over the capital and its management and made slaves of the people.

The transition to government collection of land rent should be gradual. On a small scale, the effort has begun. In seven Pennsylvania cities tax rates on land values have gone up each year while rates on buildings have gone down - eventually, it is to be hoped, to zero. The Pittsburgh land rate is five times the building rate. Home owners generally pay less. The burden falls on unused and underused land owners. The New York Times has had some supporting editorials. Fortune magazine had a powerful article praising the results.

If this strikes you as something worth striving for, make five or ten copies of this article to mail to voters at random. And do yourself a great favor: Enroll in the correspondence course offered by the Henry George Institute, 5 E. 44th St., New York, NY 10017.

Mitchell S. Lurio
Brookline, Massachusetts

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