

Van Braman

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You Series #1 of 6

THE POWER IN THE LAND

"When the Nazis overran Poland in September of 1939 they found themselves empowered to put into cruel operation a plan which Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg had worked out in harsh detail.

Those sections of Poland, which lay next to either Germany proper or East Prussia were to be completely denuded of Poles and resettled by Germans. What was to happen to the Poles living there? At first, there would be mass expulsions; later there would be systematic extermination. As many as twenty million Poles would either be worked to death in labor camps or slain instantly. That part of Poland would never again exist."

James Michener, POLAND

The reason the Germans set up this barbaric system was simple. It was a plan to enable them to take the land for themselves. The plan included provisions to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Poland, which Himmler's figures

listed as 3,547,896. In addition, the cities of Warsaw, Krakow, Lwow, well removed from German borders, would become a colony of Germany, with all of its inhabitants working for the Germans. Anyone who refused would be shot.

What you don't know that can hurt you is that the system of land tenure you live under, with its assignment of absolute power to the landowner is just as barbaric. It just doesn't look like it if you are "making it" at the moment.

Look how this country was settled. Our ancestors came here from Europe because they were for the most part landless peasants who weren't making it in their own countries. At first they met opposition from the Indians, who believed that the land was for everyone and its fruits should be shared. So they killed as many as they could and herded the rest into "camps", usually on inferior lands that they, *themselves*, didn't want.

Once they found "the final solution" to the Indian question the land was opened up for grabs. And grab they did. Many took only what they needed, but many others grabbed much more than they could ever use because they knew that they, or their descendants, could make others pay through the nose for the privilege (Latin, private law, enacted for the few, not the many) of renting "their" land so as to exist and make a living on.

Once the American Frontier was closed (once every last bit of land was grabbed up) the die was cast. The safety valve of the Open Frontier was closed and this country slowly began to drift into the same patterns of grinding hunger and poverty in the midst of great progress and extreme wealth as has every other civilization in the past.

Landowners today have exactly the same power as the Nazis had, but since they have it through the legislatures and the courts they don't have to use guns to control the rest of us. (~~And before you~~ ^{But don't} condemn anyone you know who is a landowner and who is speculating in land, holding it off the market for an artificially high price, ^{before} ~~ask~~ ⁱⁿ yourself if you wouldn't do the same if you could.) It is the system which must, and can easily, be changed.

A simple shift of higher taxation onto land and the removal of taxes on buildings and their improvements and on all other production is the proper way. But before the details of that need be explained or understood, it is the context of fairness or unfairness, morality or immorality, ^{where} ~~in which~~ we must educate ourselves.

For example, if a title holder to land is free to extract as much rent from others for use of "their" (really yours and mine) land, and if those others come to a point where they cannot pay the price, what happens?

Look at what is happening today. People are losing their farms. Their homes. Large industries have gone bust and thousands of people have lost their jobs, their pensions and their prospects. The media talks about how Americans have to adjust to a "lower standard of living" like other countries. Yet many are prospering mightily. Junk bonds and other hare-brained schemes have made a number of adventurers rich, and a lot of their victims poor. Others have gotten rich by supporting wars of adventure. For some reason, when they talk about the national debt few newscasters mention the millions (billions?) of dollars worth of U.S. Government bonds sold to other nations to finance our wars. (Example if possible) Rather than tax the public directly so that we might have a chance to protest, they go behind our backs to borrow. Did you ever see a headline in a newspaper that said "U.S. borrows \$000 billions dollars from ____ to finance killing North Vietnamese?"

And what do these corrupt practices have to do with the land under your feet, for which you pay so dearly by not having free access to it?

Most of the people operating like this do not also hold vast tracts of land that they are holding off the market for high speculative prices and for which the law allows them such large writeoffs that they pay little or no taxes. (Although some are also landowners.) But by and large, the landowner is a different breed. He likes to think of himself as a "gentleman." In past centuries landowners did little or no work because they had many servants who considered themselves lucky to have any work at all to feed their families. Today they have real estate companies which they "manage." They belong to the best clubs, they are trustees of many charitable foundations, they may even have their own foundations. They keep busy because it doesn't look good not to have some occupation.

But the truth is that if they closed their doors tomorrow, resigned from all their "charities", and moved to Tahiti and never moved from the beach they would still be rich as Croesus, ^{that's} because back in the city (or at the drilling sight) they have others like you and me working to collect unearned ground rent for them and only too glad to have jobs. (We are not speaking here of rent from premises because that kind of rent is a legitimate return to capital. It is economic interest. This is an important distinction but you don't have to understand it immediately to grasp the immorality of our present system. (You will, however, understand how it would make a positive difference if you own building space which you rent out.))

In the case of land containing natural resources, owners of these lands have monopolized minerals , coal, oil and natural gas and dispense it as if it were their own. Some of these landowners are corporate landowners, who own vast tracts of land in areas such as impoverished Appalachia. They pay as little as 2¢ an acre to hold onto land which contains rich deposits of coal, oil or minerals, completely dislocating whatever local economy there is because they contribute nothing to the economy. They are like the proverbial dog in the manger, keeping others from using what they are not using themselves. Yet you are contributing to poverty if you own stock in these companies.

In the case of commercial real estate, there is only one thing that makes that type of land valuable and that is population. As the retailer answers when asked what he believes are the three most important things in retailing- "Location! Location! Location!" If you and I were not living, working and spending in New York City, New York City real estate would be worthless. ~~Yet~~ ^TIf we weren't here the city would not spend our taxes on making the land valuable for speculators by putting in roads, sewers, bridges and other improvements.

For the most part the wheelers and dealers we've referred to do not have vast real estate holdings, although they intend to remedy that out of their ill-gotten gains. Most are Johnny-Come-Latelys; many are young, whose ancestors got here much too late to hog all the good things the country has to offer. But they have the entrepreneurial spirit, which, when not allowed to operate in a truly free market, becomes twisted, distorted and ultimately dishonest.

It is the distorted system we have of allowing only some of us to own the earth that creates the bottleneck. (In economic terms this is called 'the private appropriation of rent.') It is this system that has brought about such hideous unnatural practices such as chattel slavery, the Nazi party, the repressive Soviet system, the Savings and Loan scandal, the Medahin Cartel, Watergate, Iran Contra, CIA supported murder in El Salvador, the Mafia, the BCCI, and yes, even the farcical depredations of Leona Helmsley.

Most all of your senators and congressmen and women know that we speak the truth, and many embrace these ideas because they know they are morally right. We know that they know it because we've told them, over and over again. Year after year. But they will not act without demand from you.

In 1878, Henry George, the economist and social reformer, embarked upon an inquiry to discover why there seemed to be a direct "cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth." His "remedy" became a book, *Progress and Poverty*, which sold 2,000,000 copies and was translated into every European language. The answer he wrote to "the great enigma of our time." was that taxing the economic rent of land, and at the same time untaxing improvements on land, brings man's law in unison with natural law.

George taught that by this very process the value of land which is always created by society is returned to society. It becomes utterly unprofitable to hold good land out of use. Good land which is unused must be rented or sold to others, and because of that fact, must create employment. Here is a law of nature, which, when harnessed, produces every more and more employment. Here is the solution to the enigma propounded by our own Employment Act of 1946.(?) With a minimum of involuntary unemployment, internal and external unrest and tensions disappear. Here is the solution to the land problems of the world.

In the foreward to the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation edition of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1953, the editors wrote: "If we solve the problem by making access to land easy for all people on terms of universal and eternal justice, and by that very process eliminate involuntary unemployment and provide an economic system based on complete and absolute freedom of the individual,

then the appeal of communism with its State ownership of all land and its concomitant full employment through the surrender of all freedoms, will gradually and completely 'wither away.'"

Unfortunately this advice was not taken and the last fifty years have seen not only untold billions of dollars wasted on implements of death, but have also resulted in the murder of untold millions. Communism had to go, one way or another. But at what price?

Historian Arnold Toynbee said that all wars are fought over land. This, of course, includes the natural resources in the land. Which means that our government (and the rest of us) have supported killing Iraqis and others to "keep the oil flowing." Which means that the European powers, who 50 years ago suffered the same way from the Nazi scourge looked the other way in 1988 when the Iraqis dug holes and buried 00,000 Kurds alive because the Kurds were agitating for representation (?) and because the Iraqis want to take over their land. France, AND WHO ELSE, as well as the United States Government, were busy selling the Iraqis arms to protect their oil (??)

Yet, you may well ask yourself, if all of these things are true, why has the news media not revealed these things in their proper context?

When Henry George was inquiring into the effect that protective tariffs had upon the production of wealth he saw that the part of the question which is primarily concerned with wages and the distribution of wealth, even though at the very heart of the controversy, was unexplored territory, "from which fallacies and confusions must constantly arise, to obscure even that which has been sufficiently explained."

In his best selling Protection or Free Trade? George pointed out:

"Political economy is the simplest of the sciences. It is but the intellectual recognition, as related to social life, of laws which in their moral aspect men instinctly recognize and which are embodied in the simple teaching of Him whom the common people heard gladly. But like Christianity, political economy has been warped by institutions which, denying the equality and brotherhood of man, have enlisted authority, silenced objection, and ingrained themselves in custom and habit of thought. Its professors and teachers have almost invariably belonged to or been dominated by that class which tolerates no questioning of social adjustments that give to those who do not labor the fruits of labor's toil. They have been like physicians employed to make a diagnosis on condition that

they shall discover no unpleasant truth. Given social conditions such as those that throughout the civilized world today shock the moral sense, and political economy, fearlessly pursued, must lead to conclusions that will be as a lion in the way to those who have any tenderness for "vested interests." But in the colleges and universities of our time, as in the Sanhedrim of old, it is idle to expect any enunciation of truths unwelcome to the powers that be."

Is there any doubt that the above, written in 1886 , describes our topsy-turvy political and economic educational system today? NOT CORRECTLY STATED. SHOULD IT INCLUDE

"COMMUNICATIONS"?

Then - call to action. Contact your legislators in Washington & New York. And for further information, write:

THE ROBERT SCHALKENBACH FOUNDATION

H. S. School ?

Common Israel ?

There should be a paragraph explaining the purpose of whichever organization signed.