

Dodson

THE CENTER MAGAZINE

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The underlying thread that stitches together the three major segments of *The Center Magazine* in this issue — dialogues on Central America and the rights of workers along with the fourth, final segment of our human rights conference — is undoubtedly the theme of *responsibility*. With meticulous attention to the requirements of an appropriate human rights policy, participants in that conference from widely divergent points on the political compass have raised a full cross section of questions which require resolution on this critical theme of national policy-making. (This summer, the Center will publish a Special Report with the entire edited transcript of the conference.) The question of U.S. obligations in Central America recurred throughout the dialogue on America's role in that region, as the State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary and one of Congress's most articulate critics of the Administration discussed the dilemmas of U.S. policy options with a distinguished group of scholars. Similarly, in the Center's dialogue on "the rights of workers," the complexities of employment prerogatives underwent detailed scrutiny by representatives of labor, management, academia, and the press.

While rereading the issue as a whole before it went to the printer,

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TO THE EDITORS: The announcement for the Center's program on human rights arrived just this weekend.

What I find to be most unfortunate is that such a dialogue is deemed necessary. Can there be any doubt that human rights are being violated consistently and quite often systematically within each of the earth's societies? What does it take for individuals of conscience to recognize the growing terror under which so many of our species must exist?

One thing I am sure of: of all the causes discussed and all the solutions put forth there will be few courageous enough or sufficiently insightful beyond that offered by a very young Winston Churchill in his book *The People's Rights*. Here, early in the twentieth century, came an analysis of the human condition that demanded to be heard but has been effectively silenced by powerful interests. Churchill writes:

"It is monopoly which is the keynote, and where monopoly prevails, the greater the injury to society the greater the reward of the monopolist will be. See how all this evil process strikes at every form of industrial activity. The municipality, wishing for broader streets, better houses,

more health, decent, scientifically planned towns, is made to pay in exact proportion, or to a very great extent in proportion, as it has exerted itself in the past to make improvements. The more it has improved the town, the more it has increased the land value, and the more it will have to pay for any land it may wish to acquire. The manufacturer purposing to start a new industry, proposing to erect a great factory offering employment to thousands of hands, is made to pay such a price for his land that the purchase price hangs around the neck of his whole business, hampering his competitive power in every market, clogging him far more than any foreign tariff in his export competition, and the land values strike down through the profits of the manufacturer onto the wages of the workman. The railway company wishing to build a new line finds that the price of land which yesterday was only rated at agricultural value has risen to a prohibitive figure the moment it was known that the new line was projected, and either the railway is not built or, if it is, is built only on terms which largely transfer to the landowner the profits which are due to the shareholders and the advantages

which should have accrued to the traveling public."

There is more. At this point the author is just warming up:

"It does not matter where you look or what examples you select, you will see that every form of enterprise, every step in material progress, is only undertaken after the land monopolist has skimmed the cream off for himself, and everywhere today the man or the public body who wishes to put land to its highest use is forced to pay a preliminary fine in land values to the man who is putting it to an inferior use, and in some cases to no use at all. All comes back to the land value, and its owner for the time being is able to levy his toll upon all other forms of wealth and upon every form of industry. A portion, in some cases the whole, of every benefit which is laboriously acquired by the community is represented in the land value, and finds its way automatically into the landlord's pocket. If there is a rise in wages, rents are able to move forward, because the workers can afford to pay a little more. If the opening of a new railway or a new tramway or the institution of an improved service of workmen's trains or a lowering of fares or a new invention or

any other public convenience affords a benefit to the workers in any particular district, it becomes easier for them to live, and therefore the landlord and the ground landlord, one on top of the other, are able to charge them more for the privilege of living there."

Churchill echoed the wisdom of a contemporary British subject, Max Hirsch, whose *Democracy Versus Socialism* (1901) attacks both the monopolist and socialist structures as the antithesis of "democracy." Of socialism, Hirsch concludes (p. 326): "Instead of raising the material condition of [the] minority, socialism must lower to their level the material condition of all. A monotonous equality in unavoidable poverty will be the condition of the whole people in the socialized state." Hirsch (who dedicated his book to the memory of Henry George) would have expressed his resounding approval as Winston Churchill zeroed in on the underlying cause of human suffering: "In no great country in the new world or the old," wrote Churchill, "have the working people secured the double advantage of Free Trade and Free Land together, by which I mean a commercial system and a land system from which, so far as possible, all forms of monopoly have been rigorously excluded."

He ended with a quote from Richard Cobden, whose fight against the infamous Corn Laws has been a bright banner for the advocates of laissez-faire:

"You who shall liberate the land will do more for your country than we have done in the liberation of its commerce."

How do we, then, "liberate the land" back away from the monopolists and toward a just political economy? Through the state control and ownership of the means of production (i.e., land and physical capital) as proposed by the socialists? No. Not if Hirsch is to be believed, and I think he is. Rather, by the simple process of collecting the

"unearned increment" (i.e., the community-created land value or, more specifically, the annual rental value of land). This answer has been put forth for over two hundred years, first, by the Frenchmen Turgot and Quesnay, then Herbert Spencer, Richard Cobden, Henry George, Max Hirsch and, yes, Winston Churchill.

To that list you can also add Leo Tolstoy and Sun Yat-sen.

Yes, a dialogue on human rights will further reinforce the magnitude of the problem. The solutions are there for us as echoes of a time when wisdom almost prevailed.

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