

## The Power to Exact Wages

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A FRIEND tells me of an incident which occurred when natural gas was piped into his town. A widow complained to a morning newspaper that her landlord had raised her house rent on the ground that she could pay more because of the saving in her fuel bill. "You did not supply the natural gas," she said. "What difference does that make," he retorted, "it's my house."

The significance of the incident is not that it is striking. It is that the same condition and cause, though less obvious, affects every person in the civilized world. Government through law ignorantly stifles normal competition. It gives landownership license to hold labor off the land for a price. This limits the use of land. It keeps enterprise down as well as competition. It causes high prices in general. It makes labor compete against itself. In other words, it permits the greater part of wages to disappear in the price of land.

The point in theory that I would discuss is in the comment which my friend made on the affair. He said, "When will people wake up to the fact that ground rent is a social value and belongs in the social fund?" This provokes a few other questions which I would like to ask. Is all of present ground rent a social value? Is that which the landlord extracted from the widow a social value and does it rightly belong in the social fund? What moral right has government to legalize such "hijacking?" What right to collect from the landlord that which he clubs from widows or others? Is it a fine thing for government to be a receiver of stolen goods? Is this something to work and pray for? If so, count me out of both.

The fact is, it is not George's proposal at all. He would starve in the streets again before he would favor such a plan. He would say that which the landlord took from the widow was her wages; that no man, official or otherwise, has a moral right to this part of her subsistence. When the landlord got the extra rent from the widow it took the form of monopoly and speculative rent. As George said, "Over and above the economic rent there is the power that comes by monopoly, which may be called

monopoly rent. The power to exact that monopoly rent comes from the power to keep labor off the land."

It is clear then, that wages and its security to labor is a definite factor to reckon with in distribution. It is by all means the most important factor in livelihood. Let us therefore wake up thoroughly to the fact that as a matter of distribution, except at first to get a start, government is to collect the economic increment only, leaving the monopoly and speculative quantity in the pockets of labor as wages. Let us think more about wages and worry less about the "social services." Let us envision wages for what it is, not only a definite factor in distribution but the greatest and grandest economic provision of nature on earth. The fullness of life can come only through *WAGES*, gained through the handiwork, craftsmanship and thoughtful care of man himself, through his labor with hand and brain.

*Wages!* World wide and universal! What depth of human implications here! What a subject for writers, thinkers, leaders everywhere! This wisdom of George will be listened to when men have gone through the lower depths of the coming decade. The world straining which will result from the blind struggle to escape the consequences and to overcome the legal advantages which men have built up against each other, will give us the opportunity of the age.

This light must come! But it will have to come from the original spiritual insight and fire which since George's time has dulled down to a spark. Let us fan the true spark into a great illumination! But we shall have the breath and power for that only by returning to the original purpose of George, to elevate wages through a just distribution of wealth.

George's factual wisdom and utopian vision must be brought to all sorts and orders of people, especially to those who have suffered most from economic injustice. Let us return to the original purpose and plan. Then society will put aside the universal robbery, the exactions of legal advantages. A flood of wages will then flow over the earth so that, as George said, "The industrious will be the rich people of the future . . . That all may have leisure, comfort and abundance, not merely the necessities of life, but even of that which are now esteemed the elegancies and luxuries of life." Let us give our best thought to the problem of labor and its wages. The social fund will then almost take care of itself.—*Land and Freedom*, (N.Y.C.) March-April, 1941.