

HOLDING AND WITHHOLDING

By Fredk. Verinder.

"You take my life when you do take the means whereby I live."

—*Shakespeare.*

"Land is the mother, and labour is the father, of all wealth."

—*Sir William Petty.*

Said an ancient writer, long before the times of Petty and Shakespeare :—

"There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. . . ."

"He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him."

—*Proverbs XI., 24, 26.*

What then of him that withholdeth the land from which alone the corn can be produced?

The landholder who allows the worker to use "his" land, and charges him rent for it, is at any rate giving him a chance to live. It may be only a poor chance; he may have to work hard and fare harder, for he must share what he produces with the landlord. But it is a "sort of a chance."

But the land-withholder denies him the right to produce, by stopping the very source from which all production flows; by withholding from the willing workers the opportunity of growing or earning the corn and other means by which they live.

He is driving into the ranks of the unemployed the men who might be growing the corn, and milling it, and baking it into bread; the men who might be hewing the coal, and winning the ironstone, and burning the one to smelt the other, and fashioning the pig-iron into steel, and the steel into machines; the men who might be digging the china-clay and the tin out of the land, and making them into pots and pans; the men who might be shaping the clay into bricks; the men who might be building the houses

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which the people need on the valuable but vacant plots that surround our towns.

"He that withholdeth" building land is responsible for the high rents of the houses we have, and for the often overcrowded condition of those who live in them. He is responsible, not only for the starvation of those whom he shuts out from his own land, but for the low wages of those who are in work. His withholding "tendeth to poverty." Nothing keeps down wages so effectively as the presence of a mass of unemployed men who **must** work for some wages, however pitiful, or starve. And nothing makes unemployment so constantly or effectively as the withholding of land from uses of productive labour.

What we are asking the Government to do is to **tax** all land on its true value: to tax the holder of land, who is using it well, **no more** than the withholder of land who is keeping it idle; to tax the withholder on the value of his unused land **no less** than the improving landlord is taxed.

The landlord who is already putting his land to the best use, or is allowing others to do so, has least to fear from the taxation of land values. The man who will be "hit" first and hardest by the taxation of land according to its value for the best use to which it might be put is the man who is not putting the land to any use at all. He is injuring the community by denying the workers access to the land, without which they cannot produce the good things they need. The "injury" to himself, of which the withholder of land complains, amounts chiefly to this—that the pressure of the tax will compel him either to use the land himself for productive purposes, or to allow someone else to do so; that is, to afford new opportunities for the employment of labour and give new impetus to the production of wealth.

He that withholdeth land, the people shall—tax him.