

Solution For Labor Problem

(The 84th. weekly radio lecture by Editor L. D. Beckwith (The Forum and No Taxes), speaking as The Voice of Freedom, KWG, Stockton, Calif.)

In the broadcast of July 11 the statement was made that there are five great social problems, the Labor problem, the problem of Crooked Politics, the problem of Commercialized Vice, the Race problem, and the problem of War; and that all five of these can be solved by resort to the natural laws of economics, just as the problems of transportation, of long-distance communication, of refrigeration, of lighting, and the problem of photography are solved by resort to the natural laws of physics and chemistry.

Of the five great social problems that confront mankind, the Labor problem is the one that affects us all every day.

This is because this problem includes the problem of involuntary unemployment; and because involuntary unemployment may easily become a matter of life and death.

It is agreed that men will never be content, nor will they do their best work until all men may look forward with reasonable certainty to the day when they can let down, take time off when they feel like doing so, either to travel or to hunt and fish; or quit work and do just nothing at all until they feel like working again—even if that means that they never work again.

But involuntary idleness is not good for us. That takes the joy out of life, because it fills the most of us with fear for the future. This is the difference between free men and chattel slaves. The chattel slave need not care whether or not he has employment; he need not care how much he is idle. This is because as a chattel slave he has a property value which the owner may be trusted to protect. But the free man must look out for himself; and, if he is idle, his livelihood is endangered.

OWN LAND AND YOU OWN THOSE ON YOUR LAND

That is a false boast of the Northern states that they freed the slaves of the Old South; for they did not free these slaves. All they did for the slaves was to turn them out to starve on their own, like White folks. These ex-slaves are now the victims of a far more cruel bondage than that of chattel slavery; for though men are legally free, they are not really free unless they have free access to the land on which and from which they must live. Those who own land own those who must use that land—yet they do not have to feed the users of their land.

Man is a land animal and can live only on and from land, which is to him what water is to a fish. Landholders who hold more land than they use help to bring about a situation which compels men who wish to work, or to engage in business, to buy their jobs of job speculators; for the fact is that land speculators are really dealers in jobs—middlemen who live on what they make buying and selling jobs. The land speculator is, in fact, a speculator in jobs; and the landowners of

a community hold, in this way, the keys to the doors of opportunity in their community. Were it not for this control of community opportunities that goes with land ownership, no one would hold more land than he could use profitably.

No man can hold a job, no matter what the job may be, unless he can live within reach of that job. And to live within reach of his job, a man must either buy land within that area, or rent land there; and to do either of these things, he must deal with a landowner who, in proportion to the land he holds, controls the gates of opportunity in that community. It is the landowner's business to know what the opportunities of his locality are and how much workers can afford to pay for jobs.

"SHARE-CROPPERS" NOT ALL OUT IN THE COUNTRY

It is a mistake to imagine that share-croppers are found only in the South, or in rural communities; for under landlordism all the landless are share-croppers. Except only those who live on rent coined from the sweat of other men's faces, we are all share-croppers, living on the little of what we produce that the landowners permit us to keep for ourselves—and getting this only by the consent of landowners, and on their terms.

The rent crowd is active in behalf of schools, parks, highways, and all manner of public improvements and of public progress of all kinds; but they are not interested in such things for their own sake; but because these things enable them to raise the price of jobs.

However, the rent crowd cleverly shifts much of the cost of these things to their victims. Often the land is not taxed at all to finance them. The highways, for example, are financed by a gas tax; land is not taxed for highways, in spite of the fact that these highways enable the rent crowd to demand much higher rents. In California, we have a three-cent sales tax to raise funds for the schools. By this trick the rent crowd escapes the school tax, at least to a great degree. In the most of the states land is not taxed by the State at all; and the Federal government does not tax land. This explains why the rent crowd is so eager to get the burden of relief shifted to the state and federal funds.

The job market is a peculiar market. As a rule, when the offerings in the market are many, the price is low. In the case of cotton, wheat, clothing, or any other labor product, the larger the supply offered for sale, the lower the price. Not so with jobs; for the job market is governed by a different principle.

The more jobs in a community, the higher the price of jobs; for once the word gets out that in any community there are jobs for all, people flock in there and rent goes up. The result is that, as this rent is the price of admittance to these jobs, the price of these jobs is higher—and higher because there are so many of them on the market.

The job market differs from other markets in another way. Usually the greater the buying power of the public the higher the prices the sellers can get for their wares; and the less buying power of the public has, the lower the prices. But in the job market this rule is reversed; for the more the buyers have the more independent they are and the better their chance of getting jobs on their own terms. The result of such a condition is

that the price of jobs is low. On the other hand, the less our buying power, the more helpless we are and the more we pay.

And always the price of jobs is all the traffic will bear; for rent is always all that the landowners can get, which is another way of saying that it is all the tenants can pay—which is merely another way of saying that the landlord will leave the tenant only as much of his earnings as is necessary to keep him on the job. And when all of the land is owned, and all of the landowners are demanding as the price of the jobs they control everything their tenants make, except just enough to keep their hope alive, the tenant cannot play one landlord against another to get better terms.

The most that he can get anywhere is the least upon which he can live and do his work; so that he can do no better, even if he moves and if he moves he is out the expense of moving—so he stays where he is, for whatever share of his product the landowner is willing to let him keep.

WHY THIS DEPRESSION DOES NOT END

This explains why this depression has lasted so much longer than our former depressions—and why this one does not end. We had depressions in 1837, 1857, 1873, and 1893; and they were severe depressions. But they lasted, as a rule, not over three years; because then we still had a vast open West to which we could retreat and where we could buy jobs at a low price, and start over and again build ourselves up. But not so now! We have now retreated across the continent; we can go no further. There is no more easily accessible good land to be had for the taking.

In the old days, in the early days of the Republic, we had no land question; because there was no limit to the supply of free land. When land is free, like that, it has no value; men use it, but they do not give any thought to it otherwise. It is only when land is hard to get that men give any thought to the land. Not till then do men realize there is such a thing as a land question; and even then but few men understand it.

Unfortunately, even when land is hard to get and people begin to wonder what is happening to them, there is so little comprehension of economic principles that men are often, indeed generally, turned aside to the consideration of other matters—to almost everything, except the land question.

Not understanding economics, they do not see that the cause of our ills is that the price of jobs is too high; that the sharecroppers who "farm" these jobs are compelled to give up too much of their product for the privilege of working.

If wages are too high, they blame the employers; if money is tight, they blame the bankers; if business is poor, they blame the chain stores, or the "chisellers". Always they blame the conduct of men; and this makes bad feeling.

This would be bad enough, if there were any accepted standard by which the conduct of men could be judged; but there is not! The result is that men are bitterly blamed for not doing the right thing, when their accusers cannot agree among themselves regarding the thing that should be done!

To be correct, the solution to this problem must be one that will not impair the freedom of the individual and yet will

protect the public. Individuals must be free to hold all the land needed, and yet it must be impossible for a man to use his control of land to exploit those who, because their jobs are in that area, must have access to land in that area. While the solution we seek must leave the holder of land free to use that land as he may wish to use it, the public must at the same time be protected against the possibility that thoughtless, or anti-social holders, of land may use their land in ways that are hurtful to the public. And the terms upon which men may hold land must be fair both to the user of the land and to the public—there must be sufficient revenue without injustice to any one, either of the landed class or the landless class. And this must be true throughout the country, regardless of one's place of residence, regardless of his occupation, and regardless of his station in life and the state of his finances.

And the enforcement of the system must be certain; it must not depend upon the whims of men.

It goes without saying that it is beyond the capacity of the legislature, or of Congress, or of the courts, or of any human agency to meet these requirements. Only in the eternal fitness of Nature's plan is such perfection discoverable. Unless Nature has provided natural laws which will accomplish this, it is impossible—and a waste of time to even talk about it.

But, fortunately for humanity, Nature has done exactly this.

Her law of rent is the key to the problem. For, by the decree of nature the rent of a site is the measure of the advantages available at that site and registers automatically the exact sum which the occupant of that site owes the public for the service rendered there and the betterments to which he has access.

THE LAND IS NOT ALL OUT IN THE COUNTRY

If this rent, all of it, is collected from the occupant of the site, his debt to society is paid, and paid in full. As this rent is all that can be got for rights of occupancy, it follows that no one can profit financially by holding more land than he uses. If, then, the rent is collected into the public treasury, no one will hold more land than he uses, and all unused land becomes unclaimed land, and is available free of purchase to any one who wants it. Thus men may have as much land as they will use, but are prevented by their own selfishness from holding more land than they use. This applies to city lots, as well as to agricultural land; for the land is not all out in the country.

Not all who use land till the soil; for a dentist in a skyscraper must use land; and so must the miller who grinds the farmer's wheat. Not all men can work directly on the soil; some must stay in the cities, and others must sail the sea.

But, best of all, when the rent is collected instead of taxes, the selling price of land is destroyed. This means that the selling price of jobs is also destroyed, and jobs can be had free of purchase, and workers will cease to be share-croppers and will have for themselves all they earn. They will, of course, still pay rent; but that is simply a payment for service.

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