

LAND LIBERATION

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Private land tenure, intended to be source of freedom and security, has now become source of widespread exploitation. Land reform should be near the top of the political agenda. -- exploring other solutions -- land nationalization and the community use of land-site value.

Most people's interest in land extends to gardening, farming, use of the soil and supplying food. New-age persons argue for the family farm and a regional approach. But how aware are we of the crucial role land tenure and land ownership has in a stable economy? Knowledgeable persons insist that governments should not just "tinker" with the system by planning control over farming and forestry. They are insisting that "we, the people", must more basically remove the injustice of monopoly in land

Land-holding statistics* in America reveal how exploitative our land situation is. Here in the U.S. a handful of corporations own a land area larger than Spain or Japan. About 5% of the population own 55% of all American land. The top 1% owns more land than the rest of the population put together. During the past 50 years, 40% of the farm population has been squeezed out of their livelihood by land prices, mortgages, taxes and insurance. Today small and medium-sized farmers are leaving their land at the rate of 2,000 per week. Twenty-five landowners hold over 16%

*The People's Land, Peter Barnes, Rodale Press.

of California's land.

These conditions result largely from treating land as private property, subject to buying and selling. Questions are now being raised: Why should a small proportion of the population own the land? Why should farm laborers be an endangered species while a small group of landowners constitute the most privileged sector of our society? Why should they get huge government subsidies and generous tax allowances? "That's short-sighted", declare some questioners, "for the public and legislators to give such measures whole-hearted support."

A Basic Premise - Land Is A Common Heritage

A basic campaign to break the land monopoly rests on an obvious fact: Like the oceans and the sky, land is not man-made. It cannot be owned in the sense that one can own a television set, a book, a car, a house. Each human being has certain "rights" -- i.e. a right to life, and therefore a right to those things into which he puts his energy to create. In our life-time, each person is free to acquire and use objects which human beings produce. They are ours to use, sell or bequeath. But in the land, in the oceans and in other objects of nature, we human beings are all shareholders! Consequently, any measure is unjust which concentrates ~~concentrates~~ the possession of land into the hands of a few individuals while denying a share in them to others.

This fact -- this truth -- is so obvious that one wonders why a system of private ownership prevails in the western world. We must lay it to widespread ignorance. The land has been owned by a small number of land owners for so long that we have come to regard it as an inevitable legacy of history. Most people no

longer question the evident inequity of a small number of families and institutions owning most of California's productive farm land. In teaching history, such facts have been considered trivial compared with battle victories and the reigns of kings, queens and presidents.

Not only are we ignorant of how the few acquired what was formerly possessed by many, but we do not see how land-ownership is linked with the steady migration of people from the land into the cities. We don't know how even the land is farmed, and we are ready to abdicate our responsibility for the public's stake in ownership and management of land. We tend to say, "The farmer and the landowner know best, so let them go about their business the best they can."

The Agribusiness Lobby

A second obstacle to mobilizing a campaign for land reform stems from a misconception from the farming lobby -- i.e. that agri-business is one of the most efficient in the world. It would suffer if we did anything to change it. But here too, questions are being raised. Are we to measure the efficiency of agri-business only by its productivity per person? Can we ignore the decay of the rural communities and the flooding of rural people into decaying cities? Shall we ignore the consequent destruction of much of our landscape and wildlife? Have we carefully evaluated the huge costs (and effects) of the high technology used in agri-business? Shall we continue to measure progress by the one statistic that where once forty men worked the land, now there are but five?

"Shouldn't the real object of the 'farming industry' be to revive the rural labor force the while producing sufficient food? Wouldn't millions of more families on small farms create millions of new jobs -- in the trades and services in small villages, as well as on the land? ... question

But the biggest ~~question~~ of all is "How shall we, the people, be informed about the injustices of the land monopoly?" How prepare our Congressmen to introduce ethical ~~land~~-reform? Do they think that the only alternative to a capitalist-private-ownership to land is a socialist one? -- like the nationalization of land? (Nationalization would not be a more human one -- it would mean more factory-farming and control by a government depart of agri-business.)

Progress and Poverty

Fortunately we could break the land monopoly and avoid land nationalization, simply by introducing a land-tax to collect the ~~max~~ site-rent of land for community use. This practice doesn't nationalize land, it nationalizes only the rent of land. It leave the title and occupancy of land to the user; it retain private use and responsibility for land, but shares the socially-produced rent of land with all members of the community. Landowners would not be dispossessed so long as they paid a ground-rent to their community. The practice would sustain the community services (such as streets, sewers, ~~utilities~~ utilities, protection) and allow ending the taxation on incomes, wages, buildings.

- Constructive impact on our economy would result. The first would be encouragement to use their land--to pay a tax to hold it for higher prices, would mean using it or turning it to someone who would. This would increase the availability of land, with resulting increase in production and jobs. To thus "charge" people to hold land, increasing the availability of land means reducing the selling-price of land, and eventually eliminating that cost. Henry George presents this clearly in Progress and Poverty*.

This writer re-learned basic economics from a 20-discussion-hour course in Progress and Poverty. Asking an economic prof. why it was not included in my economics major, he referred me to page 674 in Tausig's Economics. There was a 200-word paragraph on Henry George, short shrift for one whom Dr. John Dewey rated with Plato.

Land reform is too important to leave to politicians. All of us are involved in liberty and security; our basic freedom rests on an ethical land system. All of us have a stake and a role in land-reform--environmentalists, wholesalers, educators, authors, writers, clubs, schools, colleges. Ralph Borsodi, founder of the School of Living and voice for decentralism, summed it up, "Solving the land problem is the beginning of the solution to all social, economic and political problems."

*In most libraries, or \$5.00 from Schalkenbach Fdn, 5 E. 44th NYC 10017
A 3-page paper by Ed Dodson, in The Economist, Philadelphia, titled,

Land-Site Value Tax Stimulates Economic Growth, 50c from School of Living,
RD 7, York Pa 17402.

6

Anarchism and Henry George

Many libertarians and most anarchists disagree with Henry George's land-value tax answer to the land problem. They see it making "government the landlord", which doesn't ~~increase~~ add to liberty, and of course transgresses their commitment to non-rulership and anti-government.

To this, Georgists counter that Henry George did not propose nor imply that a federal government would be collecting land-rent. Community-collection of community-produced land values would be a function of the local ward, township, county or municipality, where people not only know the local public issues, but actually know, and plan with, each other. This would imply that neighbors and townspeople would be understanding, responding to and managing their own land-distribution.

Perhaps this emphasizes the need for inter-action and discussion among capitalists, libertarians, ~~and~~ anarchists and Georgists. In actuality, libertarians ~~emphasize~~ emphasize treating land as property, subject to buying and selling in a free market. Anarchists offer the occupancy-and-use method of distributing land, wherein every person ~~owns~~ occupies only that portion of land which he actually uses and needs for his livelihood. Benjamin Tucker compared Georgist and anarchist land-policies in his journal, Liberty, and his Instead of A Book.

Aren't there unsolved ethical problems in this occupancy-and-use method of distributing land? For instance, I need and use three-hillside acres in southern Pennsylvania for our School of Living Center. It provides space for headquarters and for fruit-vegetable growing for staff. For her bookstore in Manhattan, a friend needs-uses 20' x 30' valued at hundreds or thousands of dollars per square foot. Let's estimate it at \$150,000. At current land prices my 3 acres would probably sell for \$15,000. Does ^{n't} my friend have a site-value privilege worth ten times that of mine? Hers affords her access to hundreds of thousands of ^{possible} daily customers. Mine affords peace and garden space, but it is remote from buyers. Each of us gets what we "value", but in actual reality shouldn't hers, high in community-created value, return more to the community for the use of ^{it} ~~our~~ individual sites?

The issues in land-distribution are crucial, universal, and generally hidden or ignored. This paper is to invite attention, discussion and possible agreed on experiments and policies for stabilizing the economy.