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## Epilogue

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AS HUMAN beings slowly emerged from an animal existence, tribes developed who fought one another for possession of choice areas of land as hunting preserves.

The privilege of private ownership of land had its origin when the prehistoric barbaric chieftain with a club announced to his tribesmen that all the land along this river and to yonder mountain was his. Chieftains elsewhere did likewise.

As men progressed from primitive conditions to fixed settlements in different parts of the world, groups of strong-arm men assumed ownership of the land by force, and *all land titles of today run back to and are maintained by force.*

In course of time, under selfish guidance, private ownership of land became a fixed principle of subsequently established monarchical governments, with baronies and feudal landholding, after which was patterned the land system in the American colonies.

Many advanced thinkers in America, and elsewhere, have recognized private ownership of land as an injustice to the overwhelming mass of people throughout the world, and as constituting a heavy drag on the advancement of human welfare.

To cite expressions of many such writers is more than the limits of this volume will admit, but a few here given are illustrative of the development of public thought upon the subject.

Herbert E. Holmes [72], the Maine historian, wrote: "We American people cannot submit to scrutiny the title by which we hold land . . . We do not dare to examine our national conscience, else, if we did, were we not thick-skinned and material-

istic, we would be overwhelmed by the consciousness of the debt of restitution which we can never liquidate. We may pass with barely a thought the fact that European sovereigns had no rights, founded on the principles of justice, to assume to grant to favorite subjects vast tracts of land in the Western Hemisphere, from which all existing land titles have emanated. For the sovereigns did not receive title to the land by gift of God."

Leo Tolstoy, in *Resurrection*: "The Earth cannot be any one's property."

Thomas Carlyle, in *Past and Present*: "Properly speaking, the land belongs to these two—the Almighty God, and to all his children of men."

Leviticus, 25:23: The Lord said to Moses: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

Abraham Lincoln: "An individual, or company, should never hold more land than they have in actual use."—from *Lincoln and Men of His Time*.

John Stuart Mill, in *Political Economy*: "When 'the sacredness of property' is talked of, it should be remembered that any such sacredness does not belong to land. No man made the land. It is the original heritage of the whole people."

John Ruskin: "God has lent us the Earth for our life. It is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who are to come after us, as to us; and we have no right, by anything we do or neglect, to involve them in any unnecessary penalties."

Louisiana Supreme Court decision: "Land was given by the Creator for improvement and cultivation, not for speculation; and speculation in land should receive no encouragement from legislation or courts of justice."—(In *Burows vs Pierce*, 1851).

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, in *The Hope of a New World*: "The treatment of the earth by man the exploiter is not only improvident but sacrilegious."

Dr. Sun Yat-sen: "For promotion of the welfare of the Chinese people, collection of the economic rent of land for the public treasury will be the basis of our program of reform."

Thomas Jefferson: "Whenever there is in any country uncultivated [unused] lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that

the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right."—From Ford's *Writings of Jefferson*.

"The land in any country belongs in usufruct [the right to use without title of ownership] to the living."—From *Thomas Jefferson's Works*. Washington Edition.

Herbert Spencer, in *Social Statics*, first edition, chapter IX: "We find yet further reasons to deny the rectitude of property in land. It can never be pretended that the existing titles to such property are legitimate. Should any one think so let him look at the chronicles. Violence, fraud, the prerogative of force, the claims of superior cunning—those are the sources to which titles may be traced. The original deeds were written with the sword, rather than with the pen; not lawyers, but soldiers, were the conveyancers: blows were the current coin given in payment; and for seals, blood was used in preference to wax. Could valid claims be thus constituted? Hardly. And if not, what becomes of the pretensions of all subsequent holders of estates so obtained? Does sale or bequest generate a right where it did not previously exist? Would the original claimants be nonsuited at the bar of reason, because the thing stolen from them had changed hands? Certainly not. And if one act of transfer can give no title, can many? No: though *nothing* be multiplied for ever, it will not produce *one*. Even the law recognizes this principle. An existing holder must, if called upon, substantiate the claims of those from whom he purchased or inherited his property; and any flaw in the original parchment, even though the property should have had a score of intermediate owners, quashes his right.

"'But Time,' say some, 'is a great legalizer. Immemorial possession must be taken to constitute a legitimate claim. That which has been held from age to age as private property, and has been bought and sold as such, must now be considered as irrevocably belonging to individuals.' To which proposition a willing assent shall be given when its propounders can assign it a definite meaning. To do this, however, they must find satisfactory answers to such questions as, How long does it take for what was originally a *wrong* to grow into a *right*? At what rate per annum do invalid claims become valid? If a title gets perfect

in a thousand years, how much more perfect will it be in two thousand years?"

Blackstone, in the *Commentaries*, book II, chapter 1: "There is nothing which so generally engages the affections of mankind as the right of landed property. And yet there are few that will give themselves the trouble to consider the origin and foundation of this right. Pleased as we are with the possession, we seem afraid to look back to the means by which it was acquired, as if fearful of some defect in our title; or at best we rest satisfied with the decision of the laws in our favor, without examining the reason or authority upon which those laws have been built. We think it enough that our title is derived by the grant of the former proprietor; not caring to reflect that (accurately and strictly speaking) *there is no foundation in nature or in natural law why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land.*"

Bertrand Russell wrote: "Private property in land has no justification except historically through power of the sword . . . The land became the property of those who had conquered it, and the serfs were allowed to give land rent instead of service . . . It is a singular example of human inertia that men should have continued until now to endure the extortion which a small minority are able to inflict by their possession of the land. No good to the community, of any sort or kind, results from private ownership of land. If men were reasonable they would decree that it should cease tomorrow."

John Locke, the eminent philosopher, in his renowned *Essay on Civil Government*: "It is very clear that God, as King David said, 'has given the Earth to the children of men'; given it to mankind in common. This I do boldly affirm, that every man should have as much land as he could make use of, since there is land enough in the world . . . had not the tacit agreement of men to put a value on it introduced (by consent) larger possessions, and a right to them."

Roger W. Babson, in *Fighting Business Depressions*, predicts: "Some day the public will, in some way, take the benefits of the land values which the public itself creates socially and which values are largely being unearned by the great landholders . . .

Of course, it seems too bad that these social policies were not determined upon in the early stages of our country's history, but the sooner we get back to the right principle, the better off our descendants will be."

While recognizing the injustice of, and evils resulting from private collection of land rent, Henry George, [56] in *Progress and Poverty*, declared there is no need to disturb the title or possession of those who now hold land when he wrote:

"I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate land. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain possession of their land. Let them buy and sell and bequeath and devise it. It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to collect the annual rental-value of land for public purposes—the resulting revenue to replace taxes now levied on production and consumption.

"The complete recognition of the common rights to land rent need in no way interfere with the complete recognition of individual right to improvements or produce. Everything could go on as now, and yet the common right to land be fully recognized by appropriating land rent to the common benefit."

Private land titles sanction the private appropriation of land rent and increased increment in land value. But public ownership—nationalization—of land is not necessarily the solution.

Nationalization would create vast bureaucracies to administer the management and the leasing of land to individual users. Furthermore, public advocacy of nationalization would presently attract holders of unused sites and of mineral and forest lands throughout the country, to join in the advocacy of public ownership for the purpose of having the government buy their lands.

All the social advantages of land nationalization can be attained by the public collection of land rent. This, without bureaucracy and its attendant evils and expense, and without disturbing any private land titles whatsoever.

Land value and land rent, as shown, are created by the pressure of population. This being a value created solely by the public, it should be, in all justice, collected, just as taxes are now collected, for the public treasuries for the public benefit. This would also open for employment and development desirable lands now held

unused at high speculative prices. The vast revenue from this public collection of land rent would immediately reduce, and, in time abolish, taxes on production and consumption.

That this must presently be brought about, not only in the United States but in other parts, to relieve the chaotic and complex fiscal and economic world conditions, is the belief of an ever-increasing number of profound thinkers.

W. E. Woodward, [173] in *A New American History* warns that: "It is a tendency of mankind to resist social innovations and to cherish and protect ideas that have outlived their usefulness.

"If the existing order is sufficiently flexible in mind and temper it may save itself by concessions and compromises which absorb and dilute the new social conceptions, or, on the other hand, the political structure may be so rigid that it is incapable of change. In that case, the issue between the old order and the new society evolves, by degrees, into a controversy which can be settled only by force."

In Russia nationalization of the land, and in Mexico distribution of land among the peons, were underlying objectives of the revolutions in those countries in the present century.

"It does little good to study history unless we apply its lessons to the present and future."—Editorial, *New York Times*, September 19, 1944.