

Portuguese — or if you please they rest upon conquest. In the eastern states they go back to treaties with Indians and grants from English kings; in Louisiana to the government of France; in Florida to the government of Spain; while in England they go back to the Norman conquerors. Everywhere, not a right which obliges, but to a force which compels. And when a title rests but on force, no complaint can be made when force annuls it. Whenever the people, having the power, choose to annul those titles, no objection can be made in the name of justice. There have existed men who had the power to hold or to give exclusive possession of portions of the earth's surface, but when and where did there exist the human being who had the right?"⁵

This uncompromising ridicule of titles to land is unanswerable; not one of us has any *moral* title to any natural resources we might claim to own.

But so accustomed do we become to society around us ignoring this fundamental fact that our perception of the incongruity — like the taste of water — fades. We come close to accepting that the practice of land being "owned" by individuals has somehow become hallowed by the mere passing of time; just as in English grammar, a common error can become "sanctioned by usage". Then, suddenly, a grotesque fantasy, such as a claim to own the Matterhorn, jolts us from our torpor.

For while the sanctioning by usage of a piece of corrupted English may unsettle the perfectionist, it has no effects outside the world of letters. It victimises no one; it enslaves no one; it sentences no one to pay tribute to others till the end of time.

In contrast, the commandeering of a piece of land does all of these things. Instead of granting the Matterhorn and the surrounding area to the Count-Bishops in 999, Rudolf III could just as effectively have issued them with a royal document decreeing that, in perpetuity, all people living and working in Zermatt should pay a levy to the Count-Bishops or their successors, a levy that would grow with the passing years until it became the lion's share of the wealth produced.

But whether the method adopted is the appropriation of land or the enforcement of a tribute, the common people are robbed of their possessions. It was, and is, a crime that moral law can never sanction, however long it has endured. That is the shameful significance of land ownership. Perhaps we should be grateful to Mr Julien and his associates for reminding us of these facts.

REFERENCES

1. Families of the bourgeoisie, usually wealthy. *Sunday Times Magazine*, 6 February, 1983.
2. *The Standard*, London, 28 February 1983.
3. *The New Standard*, London, 5-7 May 1981.
4. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, Centenary Edition, 1979, p. 342.

ROUND THE WORLD . . .

LAND IS A POLITICAL PROBLEM

SPECULATORS are the target of a new tax adopted by Singapore's government.

When the use of land is changed, 70 per cent of the increased value is taxed away.

"We have deliberately discouraged land speculation," explains architect William Lim. "We encourage free enterprise in all other areas."



● William Lim

There is no housing problem in the world, he says, but there is a land problem — "which is a political problem because governments protect land-owners."

Speaking at the Second World Congress on Land Policy, staged at Cambridge, Massachusetts, Mr. Lim declared:

"Land problems are not technical, academic or Third World problems, but they are political problems."

ARLINGTON'S shopkeepers expected a revival of business in the decaying downtown district when the new Washington, DC subway opened for business three years ago. Instead, many of them are being forced out of business by rents that have doubled near the stations.

'Public robbed of birthright'

AN AMAZING attack on Washington's politicians has been launched by the Editor of a scholarly journal.

In the July issue of the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* Mr. Will Lissner reported that in fiscal year 1983 the nation received \$17 billion from lease rents and royalties.

The revenue came from the private exploitation of publicly-owned natural resources on the continental shelf and the sea bottom.

"It's the public's offshore money from the people's land," declared Mr. Lissner.

But the orthodox view in the United States is that these resources ought to be sold off to the private sector. Mr. Lissner declares in a no-holds-barred comment:

"The plunderbunds within the Republican and Democratic parties, which unfortunately have been all-powerful in several recent administrations, would like to hand over, for a pittance, these leases and royalty agreements to their campaign contributors who have so pervasively corrupted American politics."

Such a sale, says Mr. Lissner, would "rob the people of their birthright, their patrimony." It was justified on the grounds of preserving capitalism, but the sale would have the reverse effect.

"Nothing would be more likely to sound the death knell of capitalism, to bring on a Soviet-style revolution and the dictatorship of the politicians and the secret police to which revolution inevitably leads."

Social science is equipped to devise rational programmes for resource taxation and land use, claimed Mr. Lissner, but these conflicted with the "privileges usurped by wealthy and powerful special interests . . . and their stooges, university professors, journalists, lawyers, politicians, officeholders and so on."

Mr. Lissner said that the present distribution of beneficial interests in natural resources was "creating billionaires whose crackpot ideas, combined with the terrible power of their hoards, threaten the survival of democracy in America."

The attempt to hive off publicly-owned resources to private interests was treasonous, wrote Mr. Lissner. Unprincipled politicians, he declared, "must be driven out of office, out of public life. The Congress's investigatory bodies should be ultra-zealous in exposing every facet of the effort."

Economics the *Political Science*
A study of the Corruption of
Economic Concepts
by V. H. Blundell

ESSRA Discussion Paper No. 3
available from 177 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1. £1.75 (p. & p. included)